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DIANA OF DARTMOOR

CHAPTER I

YOUNG DIANA

"Be sure you don't let your master know I have arrived, Jackson. I want to be a pleasant surprise."

"Very good, ma'am."

Mrs. Osborne passed through her son's consulting-room into the drawing-room, as she chose to call it. To Dr. Robert Osborne it was a smoke-room and study. The little lady, prim, daintily dressed, and still pretty at fifty-five, glanced around it disapprovingly.

"Poor boy! How the place lacks a woman's touch!" she reflected.

She thought of her elder son's vicarage at Ealing, and of the neat little semi-detached villa at Gunnersbury where she resided with her three unmarried daughters.

In these two households the "feminine touch" was paramount. It meant multitudes of faded photographs in frames of different shapes and sizes, chiefly representing members of the Osborne family, ricketty flower-vases, lace and satin cushion covers, and an infinite amount of valueless ornaments.

Dr. Osborne's inner sanctum was lined with books, lightly powdered with dust, and smelt of tobacco: the chairs were deep and comfortable, but cushionless, not a photograph was to be

seen, and the only wall decoration was supplied by a fox's head, a stand with crossed whips and hunting crops, and the oil portraits of a couple of sporting dogs.

"Katie will alter all this!" Mrs. Osborne murmured. "It is more than time dear Robert had a wife to look after him and make him comfortable."

The bay window of the inner room had a deep embrasure round which a low oak seat was fitted. Serge curtains screened off this portion of the room, from which, through a wire blind, a view of the stone-paved High Street of Merehampton was to be obtained.

"Katie" would, Mrs. Osborne felt sure, substitute curtains of frilled white muslin for the official-looking blind, and some "pretty lively-looking chintz," for the worn leather chair coverings.

The more Mrs. Osborne contemplated the bachelor bareness of the apartment, the more she rejoiced over having decided upon a suitable helpmate for her younger son.

Robert always liked dear Katie; and now that by her father's death she had come into a small fortune, she would be an ideal wife for a hardworking general practitioner in a Devonshire market town.

Mrs. Osborne ensconced herself in a corner of the cushionless window-seat to wait for her son. Presently she saw a grey mare canter up to the front entrance, before which her rider brought her up sharply, and vaulted from the saddle.

"Some young gentleman come to consult Robert," Mrs. Osborne decided as she caught a glimpse of the bright-coloured skin and blue eyes of the rider.

A sharp tread in riding-boots announced the entry of the visitor into the consulting-room. Sounds of whistling next reached Mrs. Osborne's ears. The young gentleman was apparently impatient, for he tramped up and down the floor, and shouted to Jackson in a fresh, musical voice to be sure and tell "the doc" as soon as he came home that someone was waiting for him.

"The 'doc' indeed!" Mrs. Osborne murmured. "Impertinent boy!"

Robert would doubtless soon arrive to teach the lad proper manners. Robert was not the man to forgive a liberty, and—"Hallo, Bob!" cried the musical voice in an accent of relief. "Thought you were never coming! Let's go to the study: I'm dying for a cigarette."

The folding doors were ajar. Dr. Osborne's visitor flung them open, and slammed them to after passing through with the doctor. Neither of them saw the little lady in the window-seat, and she, for her part, peeped out at them spell-bound, at first with indignation, and then with surprise.

For the impertinent lad, as tall as Dr. Osborne himself, and dressed in the neatest and straightest of long brown coats above riding-boots fitted with spurs, yet wore beneath a hard felt hat a plait of black hair fastened up with a ribbon—fatal evidence of belonging to the sex of which Mrs. Osborne was a decorous and self-respecting member!

Surely, Robert's mother thought, he would turn again to rend his unmannerly visitor with some scathing reprimand. But no! Never had she heard a tone so sweet, so caressing as that in which he addressed her.

"Sit down, my dear child," he said, drawing

forward an easy chair, "and tell me all about it. I hurried home after getting your note : but old Mrs. Finch kept me—"

"Old humbug, isn't she? There's nothing really the matter with her but anno domini : I've often heard you say so. Give me a light, Bob. And now tell me straight out : what have you been saying to my dad, and what's the matter with him?"

"What has he been saying to you."

"Oh, any amount of rot, you know. About his having neglected me—"

"So he has."

"And my having run wild—"

"So you have."

"Don't chip in, Bob! I suppose the real fact is you pulled him up about me when you came to see him? You might have given me the tip. It wasn't the behaviour one expects from a pal."

"Now listen, Reine! I did not mean you to know; but perhaps it is better as it is. Your father had been feeling ill and he sent for me. I made a thorough examination, and found out what I guessed long ago. His heart is in a very bad state. Over-riding and carelessness in diet—"

"You mean too much whisky and soda."

"Well, spirits between meals and the first thing in the morning are the worst possible things. I put it to your father that for your sake he ought to take more care of himself."

"You nearly frightened him to death. He wrote off to his lawyer, and to that scrapegrace cousin of his who takes the Chase if anything happens to him, and worst of all, to that psalm-singing Lady Elizabeth, widow of his other cousin Major Hatherleigh. I don't know what

he said; but I saw her answer and it nearly made me sick. 'If Heaven should claim you, dear John,' she wrote, 'I accept as a sacred trust the care of your beloved daughter until her majority.' Poor Dad is all right, I do believe. But you have gone and frightened him into leaving me as a sacred trust to some carneying old cat who would make my life a—"

"Nonsense, child! I hope your father may live for many years. But he has done the right thing in finding you a guardian. I have heard nothing but good of Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh—"

"Don't you believe it! A woman who stayed with us for the hunting last winter—Mrs. Willie Devereux, do you remember? Jolly smart and rather made-up. She was telling a story about Lady Elizabeth when I came into the drawing-room and caught a word or two. 'Not such an angel as people think,' she said, 'and I ought to know, as I was in India with her.' That's all I heard; but I set on Dad to write and ask Mrs. Devereux for the rest of it before he hands me over to her."

"It is beneath you, Reine, to pay attention to the silly, spiteful scandal some women talk about each other."

"Don't preach! Especially as all the bother is your fault. Why couldn't Dad make you my guardian? I should have loved it. But I wouldn't have allowed you to have any young lady patients!"

This was more than Robert's mother could stand. Was this unfeminine horror going to make love to her son? Very stately, in spite of her small size, she came forth from the shadow of the curtains, and faced Dr. Osborne as he stood smoking a cigarette on the hearth-

rug, coming in between him and the slim girl in boyish riding dress who sat smoking in the easy chair.

Robert Osborne was thirty-three and looked older, in spite of his ruddy skin and clear grey eyes. He was clean shaven, and his roughly-modelled features were redeemed from plainness by the humorous kindness of his expression. He was of medium height and broadly built, with a well-knit figure, and his curly dark hair was prematurely sprinkled with grey.

A man of character and determination: thoroughly to be trusted, and, as his poorer patients put it, "every inch a gentleman." Even his domineering little mother was in some awe of him, and noted with misgiving the frown of annoyance with which he greeted her sudden appearance.

His manner towards her was, nevertheless, all courtesy as he took her two small hands and kissed her forehead.

"It was nice of you to come earlier than I expected you, mater," he said. "I am glad to introduce to you one of my oldest friends in Merehampton, Miss Reine Hatherleigh. In the last four years I have mended her collar-bone, and set her arm, and generally put her to rights after she has undertaken impossible jumps."

"Are you very fond of riding?" Mrs. Osborne asked with frigid politeness, raising her eyes from her altitude of five feet one to the five feet nine of Miss Hatherleigh.

If she had not been prejudiced, if she had not been pained and shocked by the "ride astride" costume, which was not approved of about Gunnersbury and Ealing, Robert's mother could not have failed to perceive the charm of

Reine Hatherleigh's face, the pink and white fairness of her skin, the brightness of her deep blue eyes under curled black eyelashes, and the mutinous sweetness of her full red lips. The face on the slight, erect figure suggested rather an unusually handsome boy than a girl, and Reine's well-shaped aquiline nose and square chin betokened originality and independence. But to Mrs. Osborne she was nothing more than a slangy, unladylike hoyden, whom it was her duty as Robert's mother to repress, as far as a patient might be repressed without injury to her son's practice.

"I like riding better than anything," Reine replied. "In fact, I hardly do anything else—except play billiards pretty badly."

Mrs. Osborne drew in her lips.

"There are so many pleasant occupations for a lady in the country," she suggested. "Music and sketching—"

"I hate the piano and I can't draw."

"An agreeable circle of friends and acquaintances," Mrs. Osborne continued, holding the girl with a stony glance of disapproval, "help to pass the time pleasantly. Social duties—"

"Do you mean paying calls?" Reine inquired. "Because there's hardly anything I detest so much. I always feel out of it in a drawing-room—stuck on a chair in one's best clothes to talk twaddle among a lot of silly little furniture one knocks over if one moves."

"There is needlework—"

"I can't sew."

"When I was a girl, living in the country at my father's vicarage, I interested myself greatly in my poorer neighbours. Much may be done to alleviate their lot by sympathy and counsel."

"District visiting? I'm no good at all at it. Feel it a sort of liberty, and that they might just as well district visit me."

Robert's mother gazed up at the girl with mingled pity and aversion.

"I am afraid I am old-fashioned in my ideas, Miss Hatherleigh," she said. "My own girls have been brought up to interest themselves in all womanly occupations, and they find plenty of happiness in life outside riding like a boy and playing billiards and smoking."

A deep blush swept over Reine's face. She was about to speak, but checked herself, and after a moment's pause took her gloves and hunting crop from the table, and held out her hand to the doctor.

"Good-bye, Bob," she said, "I expect you are longing for a good talk with your mother, so you must both excuse me for going off."

She bowed to Mrs. Osborne, who did not offer to shake hands, and strode out of the study, followed by her host, who had listened to the feminine skirmish with the paralysed helplessness shown by the mere male on such occasions.

"Now, what did she mean by getting at me in that way?" Reine exclaimed as they reached the hall. "I'd much rather have been friends with your mother. It was playing it pretty low down to let me give away my private affairs to you and then jump out. I might have had my company manners on if I'd known she was listening. What does it matter to her if I don't sew or bang the piano or worry the poor? I don't hurt anybody by riding or playing billiards, as far as I know!"

Her eyes were on a level with his, and to his dismay he saw tears in them.

"You silly child, surely you are not really hurt?" he exclaimed. "My mother is the best woman alive. But she lives in a narrow little circle. And you were doing yourself an injustice. You are as fond of good music as I am, and the people on your father's estate love you for your kindness."

"I give them sixpences now and then, and pinch the children's cheeks when they are pretty. But I can't go and peer into their saucepans and bully them into keeping their places clean. Your mother thought I was unfeminine."

"So you are from her point of view!"

Reine smiled into his face with soft blue eyes in which tears were shining.

"And what do you think?" she asked.

It was a child's frank coquetry; but to the man before her, who loved her with every fibre of his body and every beat of his heart, it was almost irresistible.

Had Robert Osborne declared his affection for her at that moment, the course of Reine Hatherleigh's history might have been very different, and domestic peace and quiet have taken the place of fierce tragedy.

But Robert was fifteen years older than Reine, a hard working doctor, building up an unremunerative practice; whereas Reine was a beauty and an heiress, the daughter of a baronet, and the kinswoman of many persons of title and distinction. He had no reason to suppose that she cared for him. Friendship only shone in her brilliant eyes when they rested upon him: passion, were it ever to come there, was undreamed of yet.

"I think you are a tiresome lad, and that you ought to have been licked into shape in a

public school!" he said, taking refuge in one of his usual jests.

Reine flicked at him with her whip as she passed out, laughing, and sprang into the saddle of the grey mare.

"What a terrible young person!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne when her son rejoined her. "I have heard of these slangy, riding-astride women, but I have never met one before. And how extraordinarily familiar she is with you! I suppose that type of girl is familiar with all men, from stable-boys upwards."

"Mother," said Dr. Osborne, stopping in front of her chair and speaking very gravely, "I must beg you not to talk about Reine Hatherleigh until you know her better. Her mother died when she was five, and she has been brought up chiefly at Larne Castle with her two Irish cousins, Lord Newtown's boys, who were drowned three years ago. Sir John Hatherleigh has neglected her education abominably. But whatever she may have lacked in training, Reine is the kindest, straightest creature I have ever met; unselfish, brave, and loyal, incapable of lying or meanness, and—"

"You are in love with her," cried his mother. "Oh, Robert, I am dreadfully sorry for you!"

"I love her and shall always love her," Dr. Osborne, said after a pause. "But you need not be sorry, mother. For she will never know it, and it is an honour to love such a brick of a girl as Reine Hatherleigh!"

CHAPTER II

BEAU HATHERLEIGH

SIR JOHN HATHERLEIGH's library at the Chase overlooked the vast wing of stables over which he had lavished a considerable part of his fortune.

He was passionately fond of horses and constantly cheated over the purchase of them, devoted to riding and perpetually thrown. No obstacle was too big for him to attempt to surmount it, no descent too precipitous for him to ride at it headlong.

The library was spacious and well furnished with bookcases. But the only literature which the baronet patronized lay about on his desk: studbooks, racing calendars, turf commentaries, sporting newspapers, a few horsey novels, and some financial journals. The last showed another bent of Sir John's mind. Again and again he had tried, with unvarying ill success, to retrieve his losses in the betting ring by "plunging" in the City. The result was well known to the army of extravagant retainers who fattened on his careless bounty. By the time Miss Reine came into her money it was prophesied on all sides that her father would be a ruined man. Luckily, Miss Reine would have enough to run the pair of them, and it was hoped that things would go on as before.

On this particular day, when Reine had sought the counsel of Dr. Osborne, the baronet

had risen early and gone cub-hunting. He had left word that he would be in before four o'clock, at which hour he expected a gentleman on business. The gentleman would give the name of Hatherleigh, and was to be shown into the library; but if Miss Reine were in, she was not to be informed of his visit.

Speculation concerning the visitor was rife in the servants' hall and in the stables. Major Hatherleigh, Sir John's cousin, had disappeared in a punitive expedition against a border tribe in India nine years before, and the only other known Hatherleigh was Captain Torrens of that ilk, who had not been inside the Chase for fourteen years.

Mrs. Welfare, the tall, gaunt housekeeper, who had passed thirty-five years of her life in the Hatherleighs' service, was the member of the household who best remembered the Captain.

"Like a picture he was at twenty," she would say, "and it went to my heart when the master told me I wasn't ever to speak of him. Oh, I don't say Miss Reine isn't well enough, though she's more like a boy than a girl. She takes after her mother, that was Irish, one of the Fitzalans of Larne. But Master Torrens was a true Hatherleigh in face and in nature. I shall always believe there was no real harm in him, and that he was more sinned against than sinning."

There were too many servants at the Chase and there was not enough for them to do. As a result gossip was rampant.

Since Dr. Osborne's visit Sir John had grown melancholy, had taken to writing letters, had summoned his lawyer, and now, in all probability, had made an appointment with the future owner of the property.

What had he got on his mind?

On that particular afternoon another exciting topic of talk was offered to the household of the Chase. Barney Lucas, an over-sharp stable lad, was discovered by one of the maids hidden in Sir John's dressing-room, with his pockets stuffed with unconsidered silver trifles, and was locked by the butler into the library to await the return of the master of the house.

Big events from trifling causes spring. It was the afternoon out of Horrocks the butler, and he was much exercised in mind over the courtship of the fair and widowed hostess of the Hatherleigh Arms in the village. At a quarter to three the upper housemaid unearthed Barney Lucas in a cupboard; at three Barney was being lectured in the butler's pantry: at twenty minutes past he was being dragged by the ear into Sir John's study, wherein he was carefully locked by Mr. Horrocks; and at twenty minutes to four the last-named gentleman, in splendid array, set forth on his wooing expedition, resolved to propose to the widow or die, and having totally forgotten to inform the footman of the imprisonment in the library of the dishonest stable-boy.

It was a rough September afternoon. The Chase stood on high ground and overlooked many miles of open country, from the bleak hills of Dartmoor close at hand to the grey outlines of Exmoor forty miles away. A belt of oaks and ash-trees gave some protection to the rambling granite structure; but the wind rattled the windows, and sweeping across the heather-clad moorlands, whistled round the chimneys of the Chase, and drove the smoke down into the rooms.

The house was in such an exposed position

that even in summer fires were often needed in the great low-roofed rooms. Barney Lucas sat shivering on a chair, not with cold but with apprehension, for ten minutes after his incarceration by Horrocks. Escape was difficult, for the two windows overlooked the stable-yard, and in the stables Barney was not popular. Ever since his arrival little articles had been missed among the men there, and he had small doubt that by this time the news of his capture had reached them, and the contents of his box would probably be exposed to their investigations.

Barney was a black-haired, hook-nosed lad of fifteen, by no means ill-looking, save that his dark eyes were set too near together and that their glance was shifty.

Thief's hands, slender and crooked in the fingers, characterised him, and the movements of his slim frame were as light and agile as those of a cat. Thieving was natural to Barney, who was the son of a gypsy fortune-teller and a travelling acrobat; but the lad was not wholly bad, and towards one member of the Chase household he entertained feeling of real affection.

Miss Reine had found him out in a theft shortly after his arrival, and had lectured and forgiven him. If he could appeal to her he was sure she would not let him be arrested. Horrocks had not been willing to take it upon himself to send for a policeman, but he had assured Barney that Sir John would do so.

Barney measured with his eye the distance from the library window to the stable-yard.

"If there's no one about I might jump it and give them the slip," he reflected. "I don't believe she'd let them hunt me down when she got to hear of it."

Meantime, they had taken away his booty, and would 'probably confiscate the contents of his box. His month's wages would be due the next day, and there was no money on him.

Barney's cunning eyes ranged the room.

"May as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," he decided. "I'll lay the governor's got some tin in that desk!"

Very swiftly, very deftly, the small crooked fingers overhauled the contents of the drawers and compartments in the massive three-sided writing-desk. At any moment Sir John might enter; but Barney trusted to hearing the key turned in the lock in time to retreat, even if he were not able to decamp before the baronet arrived.

At first only a few stray coppers and a broken scarf pin rewarded his efforts. Barney warmed to his work: he had heard of secret drawers, and by inserting his fingers and softly tapping the wood-work, he discovered the existence of a hollow space at the back of the centre compartment of the desk. Careful manipulation revealed the spring which, being pressed, a long shallow drawer flew open, and showed to his greedy eyes a roll of sovereigns, a bundle of bank-notes, and a large sealed envelope on which was scrawled the initials "T. H.," and and the word "important."

He would not take all the gold, nor would he trust himself with the notes, the numbers of which might be discovered. Out of the thirty pounds he appropriated fifteen, and was about to close the drawer when his eyes became attracted by the sealed envelope.

To be hidden away so carefully it must be of value. Fingering it, he could feel that it contained papers. Possibly the contents were of

such importance that Sir John might pay for their recovery. All things considered, it might be as well to arm himself with the sealed envelope.

Barney slipped it into his pocket, replaced the drawer, and relocked the desk with the keys, which had been carelessly left on the pen-tray. Then he crossed to the window, and was about to open it and drop into the courtyard when he heard the handle of the library sharply turned once or twice, and the key twisted in the lock.

He had barely time to creep behind the heavy curtains of the window when the door was opened, and the footman showed a gentleman into the room.

"I don't know why it was locked, Sir," the man said. "The master gave orders you were to be shown in here. We expect him every moment."

The visitor, who was in riding dress, stood with his back to the fire and surveyed the room.

Barney could see him plainly through the braid edging to the curtain, and never yet had his eyes beheld anyone better groomed or more comely.

The man appeared to be about thirty. Youth and a hearty enjoyment of life shone in his brilliant blue eyes, and as he glanced about the library a smile played about his lips, as though he were thoroughly content with himself and his surroundings.

Tall and splendidly proportioned, with a skin as fair as a girl's, reddened by sunshine and exercise, and delicate white hands with which he constantly stroked his golden moustache, Captain Torrens deserved his name of Beau Hatherleigh and his former reputation of being the best-looking man in the service.

If one thing more than another gave him a distinguishing charm it was the boyish sweetness of expression, the frank desire to please and to be pleased which showed itself in his every glance and movement.

A pang of envy shot through Barney as he noted how admirably his clothes fitted him. Barney had the instincts of a dandy, and he asked himself whether he would ever in a lifetime of successful thieving be able to afford himself such a tailor as was honoured by the fair-haired gentleman's custom.

Five minutes were ticked away by the black marble clock on the mantelpiece. Captain Torrens left off warming and stroking his moustache, and fixed his sunny blue eyes upon a pile of unopened letters which lay upon Sir John's desk. Crossing the room he carefully examined them.

He was so near to the curtain behind which Barney was hidden that the lad could have touched him by stretching out his arm, so near that Barney could smell the pleasant perfume which hung about him, and could hear the exclamation which escaped him as he lifted one large mauve envelope in his hand.

"Dot Devereux, by Jove!"

Barney almost gasped. For the next moment, after a quick look round, Captain Hatherleigh slipped a paper-knife into the envelope, and proceeded to read the letter addressed to his cousin.

The contents clearly interested him. He frowned as he read them, and the colour in his cheeks deepened. Then he burst out laughing, and going to the fireplace, he tore up the letter and envelope, and held them down on the coals with the poker until they were destroyed.

The master of the Chase found him in the act. Torrens put back the poker with a gay smile.

"My dear Jack, being a relative, I was venturing to poke your fire. How are you, old boy? Jolly well you look!"

"I don't look well and I don't feel well. Otherwise I should not have sent for you."

"That isn't much of a welcome to the old home."

"It never was your home."

"But it will be!"

"That is what I have to talk to you about."

Sir John sat down behind his desk and glanced over his letters. In face and figure there was considerable resemblance between the cousins. The baronet was seventeen years the Captain's senior, and was stouter, balder, and more florid than "Beau" Hatherleigh. Sir John had ridden hard and to a certain extent had lived hard: at fifty-three he was still a handsome man; but the colour in his cheeks was tending to purple, and his fine figure was impaired by increasing girth.

Torrens, who had not been invited to a seat, remained before the fire, critically regarding him.

"He's breaking up," he reflected. "Is that why he sent for me?"

Aloud he asked:

"Did you have a good run?"

"Fair. Was the chestnut mare at the door yours?"

"Yes. Nice animal, isn't she?"

"Showy. You must have given a good figure for her."

"Two hundred and fifty at Tattersall's last June. Daughter of Arum Lily by Sovereign.

Let you have her for two hundred and twenty-five if you fancy her."

"No, thanks. One must have a high opinion of a man's honesty to do a deal in horses with him."

"Hang it all, Jack—"

"Can you explain to me how you do it, Torrens? Here you are, rigged out as on my honour I can't afford to be, everything of the best, and riding one of the prettiest mares I've ever set eyes on. Friends tell me you have a smart flat off Piccadilly, and that you are always to be seen at Hurlingham and Ranelagh and the Opera in the season. You attend every race meeting and have something on every event. You play polo, you motor, you play bridge for high stakes, you go abroad in the winter, and yachting in the summer, and hunting in the autumn. You do everything, in fact, and what do you do it on? You've been bankrupt twice, you left the Army because you had to, you were sent down from Cambridge and kicked out of Eton."

"Why not go back a little farther and reproach me for being spanked as a baby? If I spend money, it isn't yours, is it? I don't borrow it from you. How do you expect me to live? In a dog kennel, or a hut on Dartmoor?"

"A cell at Princetown is more what you deserve."

"So you haven't forgotten that boyish trick yet!"

"Boyish trick! You were twenty-one when you forged my mother's name, two days after she was dead. And I know from her letters that you had robbed her again and again."

"Aunt Eva was wonderfully good to me,"

Captain Hatherleigh said softly. "I wish to Heaven she had been my mother! I might have been very different."

"She was much too good to you. But we are not here to talk about all that. My health has not been good of late. My doctor tells me it is heart, and that a shock might settle me. I am worried about what might happen to my girl Reine if I should be taken suddenly."

"Eighteen, isn't she? I remember her as a very pretty baby."

"She is beautiful, and as good as she is handsome."

"Well, she'll be all right, surely. Hasn't she her mother's fortune?"

"Money is not everything. Reine will want a home. She has always lived here."

"I assure you I shouldn't want to turn her out. I can't afford to keep up this place, but Reine could rent it of me until I can sell it."

"Sell the Chase!"

"Why not? I don't worship stones and chairs and tables. If that is what you sent for me about, I can settle your doubts. When I am master of this property it will go to the highest bidder in the shortest possible space of time."

Sir John rose and slapped his hand upon his desk.

"That bidder must be my daughter!" he said sharply.

"Do you want me to marry her?" the Captain inquired coolly.

"God forbid! My girl marry such a man as you!"

"Look here, Jack! I've had enough insults! If you have nothing civil to say I shall ride back to Merehampton for dinner. Unless you

have the ordinary decency to ask me to dine here."

"I cannot ask you to meet my daughter. Friendly relations between us are impossible; I know too much about you. You've been a wrong 'un from the beginning. You have lied to and cheated and ruined every man and woman who trusted you. My father pulled you out of one scrape after another until he got sick of you. My mother went on believing in you even after you had picked the rings off her fingers when she fainted, and pawned them to pay for your vices. You were a little too clever when you forged her name after she was dead. No doubt you thought she would have owned the signature rather than give you away. I've got that cheque, and letters of yours to her, acknowledging other thefts and forgeries, safely locked away. If you don't come to the terms I am going to propose I shall use them against you."

Captain Torrens laughed.

"You forget that there is such a thing as a statue of limitations," he observed. "All this belongs to fourteen or fifteen years ago."

"Do you want it published? Do you want the smart set you are in to know your real character?"

Torrens Hatherleigh lit a cigarette carefully, without looking at his cousin, before he answered. When he did so, his mellow voice rang sharper than usual.

"Of all the infernal cads I ever met," he then said slowly, "I think you are the limit. You never liked me and you were always jealous of me. So you rake up some boyish follies of mine in order to drive a bargain. What is it? Out with it!"

"I require you to sign a deed, which will be drawn up by a lawyer, engaging to let Reine buy this place of you on my death for the sum of five thousand pounds. As soon as that is done I will arrange that the papers incriminating you shall be placed in the care of my lawyers and handed to you in the event of my death."

"Do you really believe I shall be such a fool as to let your daughter buy for five thousand pounds a place I shall put up at twenty or twenty-five thousand?"

"I mean to force your hand. The Chase, where we Hatherleighs have lived for four hundred years, shall not be sold to enrich a thief and a forger."

Sir John was not allowed to finish the sentence.

Barney, watching spell-bound, saw a change pass over the Captain's face. The look of kindly good humour vanished, and under the sunburn the fresh colour paled: the nostrils quivered, and the eyes seemed to flash blue fire. Sir John knew his cousin's furious temper of old, and provoked it unwisely, being obstinately bent upon securing his daughter's interests. Before he realized what was happening he was struck savagely in the mouth, and hurled from his chair on to the floor.

Torrens bent over him with his knee upon his chest, pinning him down, and growling over him a volley of oaths which chilled even Barney Lucas's blood.

"Not fit to dine with you and your infernal tomboy, eh? A thief and a forger—I've a jolly good mind to be a murderer, too. But you're not worth killing!"

"Take your fingers off my throat! You are strangling me!" gasped his cousin.

"Where are those letters of mine?"

"Let me get up! Your weight crushes me!"

"Where is that cheque?"

"Help! Murder!"

Torrens slipped his hand upon the mouth of Sir John, over whose face a purplish tint was creeping.

"You locked the door: no one can come in," he said. "Tell me where they are and I will let you go!"

"My desk—secret drawer at back—for pity's sake—brandy—"

Captain Hatherleigh sprang to his feet and hurried to the desk, paying no attention to his cousin's feeble moans. Barney could see him flinging about the papers until his fingers lighted on the spring, and the inner drawer sprang to light, with the gold and the roll of bank-notes as its sole contents.

The boy's brow was wet with terror, and he trembled so much that he feared the shaking of the curtain would betray him. It was not the thought of his master which alarmed him, but the look on Captain Hatherleigh's face, and the knowledge that the packet of papers which he sought was lying securely in his own pocket.

"There's nothing here but money," Torrens began, and then stopped short, struck by the stertorous sound of his cousin's breathing. He pushed back the drawer, let fall the lid of the desk, and bent over Sir John, who still lay as he had left him, stretched upon the floor.

More than once Captain Hatherleigh had seen death, and he knew it now.

Not a touch of regret, but some anxiety clouded his face as he stared at the dying man. Sir John's death was the best possible thing for

his own interests ; but what would come out at the inquest ?

He crossed to a spirit-stand, and pouring out some brandy and soda, he drank it off. Re-filling the glass with neat spirit, he knelt by the prostrate man and held it to his lips.

But Sir John was already past consciousness or human help. To Barney hours seemed to pass while Torrens knelt, glass in hand, by his cousin's side, and watched him die.

A loud tapping at the door made him start violently. The knocking continued, the handle of the door was sharply turned, and a girl's voice was heard calling impatiently to be let in.

The laboured breathing continued : to Barney the sound was deafening. Then his eyes, starting from their sockets, beheld Torrens holding down a handkerchief over his cousin's face. A moment later he had sprung up, had rung the bell violently, and, with the glass still in his hand, had rushed to the door, unlocked it, and flung it open.

Reine Hatherleigh, flushed and lovely, her short dark curls blown about her face by the wind, stood in the aperture in her riding dress, holding her hat in her hand.

Before she could speak Torrens slipped his arm within hers and drew her from the room.

"My poor child," he murmured tenderly. "You cannot come in now. Your father is very ill indeed. A doctor must be sent for. I am your cousin Torrens ; you can trust me to see to everything."

Before the scene of wild confusion which followed Barney Lucas, left alone with the dead man, unfastened the window with trembling fingers, and leaping down to the stable-yard,

fled from the precincts of the Chase as a hare before the hounds.

With the turf and heather beneath his feet, and the wind and rain sweeping over Dartmoor upon his face, he stopped to draw breath at last.

"He'd have strangled me if he'd 'a found me!" he whispered. "Lord, what a cool hand and what a murderous devil! But I've got the whip hand of him if I ain't afraid to use it!"

CHAPTER III

THE NEW MASTER

"My dear sir, I never had such a shock in my life. My cousin wrote asking me to come down ; I've got the letter with me. We were chatting on business. Oddly enough, he was telling me about his heart being weak. He was sitting in that chair by the desk. Suddenly he lurched over, gave a groan, and fell where you see him bringing the chair with him. I couldn't think what was up at first. He called for brandy, and kept on pulling at his neck tie. I got him the brandy ; but he didn't seem able to swallow it. He'd locked the door, so that we shouldn't be interrupted. While I was bending over him I heard Miss Hatherleigh at the door. I rang for help, and unlocked it, and led her away, and sent for you. Then, when I found the poor chap was past help, I turned the servants out—for they had all come crowding in—and locked the door, so that you should see just how it happened. Of course all that was nearly three hours ago ; but as I knew no one could do any good, I kept the room locked up until you came."

"Was your talk of an exciting nature ?"

"Well, yes. You see, this place is entailed to me, and, as I am the last of the entail Jack asked me what I should do if anything happened to him. When I said that the Chase was no good to me and I should sell it, he worked

himself into a tremendous excitement, and, I suppose, brought on the attack which killed him. I hadn't paid much attention to what he said about his health, and he seemed perfectly fit the moment before."

Captain Hatherleigh's voice rang with deep concern. He was standing as before by the fireplace, stroking his moustache, with his eyes fixed intently on Dr. Osborne, who knelt by the side of the dead man.

Torrens Hatherleigh had been in many a "tight" place and had slipped out of them by the help of his airy self-confidence. He was a good, if superficial, judge of faces, and he decided that this country practitioner was a clear-headed, honourable man, whose favorable opinion was of vital importance to him at this juncture.

Dr. Osborne's long silence got upon his nerves.

"What was it killed him, Doctor?" he inquired at last.

Robert Osborne rose to his feet and paused before replying.

"I have not finished my examination yet," he said. "A week ago I warned Sir John about the state of his heart—"

"Then it was heart disease which killed him?"

"I shall be able to tell you better presently."

"It's an awfully sad business! I can't thank you enough for bringing over your wife. Of course my poor little cousin wants a woman friend with her. Mrs. Osborne will stay here for the present, won't she? And you too, Doctor."

"Mrs. Osborne is my mother, not my wife. When the groom told me Sir John was dead I felt Miss Hatherleigh would need a woman

could anyone guess where she was until Robert Osborne's intuition led him to the stables.

In the stall of Sir John's favourite hunter he found her, standing with her arms round the mare's neck, and her face hidden against its mane.

"Thelma was fonder of dad than anyone," Reine explained, "and she was a jolly lot more sympathetic than people are when I told her about him."

Robert understood; but then Robert always understood Reine. He patted her shoulder, as though she had been a boy chum, and led her to his mother in the drawing-room. He knew there was little in common between the two women; but he held a man's mistaken notion that there is a secret freemasonry which makes female things friendly if they are left alone together.

He forgot, as he hurried back to his serious work in the study, that Reine was still in the attire which had so scandalised his mother earlier in the afternoon, and he failed to note Mrs. Osborne's look of pious horror as he briefly explained that he had found Miss Hatherleigh "in the stables."

"Talking over her father's death with the grooms, no doubt!" his mother reflected. "Possibly smoking with them over it. This is the modern girl!"

Kathleen Pringle, the daughter-in-law of Mrs. Osborne's choice, had done precisely the right thing when she lost her father.

She had received with gentle gratitude the elder lady's visit during her affliction, and had wept copiously whilst recounting at length her "dear Papa's" last moments. She had then written several letters to Mrs. Osborne on the

subject on notepaper with a deep black border, and had expressed in beautiful language her resolve to bear her "irreparable loss with Christian fortitude."

And here was Reine Hatherleigh, "dressed like a boy and smelling of tobacco," dragged from the stables as soon as her father was dead, and staring out of the window, while she evidently hardly listened to her visitor's pious homily on the shortness of human life and other edifying subjects.

"Splendid of you to have come over to us like this!" Torrens said as he seated himself near Mrs. Osborne.

Reine's eyebrows went up and she flushed at the personal pronoun.

All she knew of her father's cousin was that Sir John considered him a "wrong 'un," cursed through life by an inability to "run straight."

There was no getting over the fact that he was pleasant to look at, a true Hatherleigh in appearance. His likeness to her father endeared him to Reine. She and the late baronet had been unlike the usual father and daughter in their relations. The girl knew little of London and hated what she knew, and Sir John's friends and amusements there she ignored. But they both loved sport, and had been, as she would have put it, "jolly good pals."

It was pleasant to turn from the coldly disapproving countenance of that over-tidy little lady in rustling black silk (for Mrs. Osborne had donned mourning attire for the visit) to the genial face of Torrens, which was so like a handsomer version of her father's. Torrens talked to Mrs. Osborne; but his kind blue eyes rested constantly upon Reine's face, and although

she could not help resenting his use of the word "us," she began to like him.

"Robert thought it was my duty to come, under the painful circumstances," Mrs. Osborne explained. "I only left my home at Gunnersbury on a visit to him this morning, and I must be getting back to Merehampton as soon as he is ready—"

"Pray don't think of it, dear Mrs. Osborne. I have come with an invitation, which I am sure your kind heart will make you accept. I know I speak for my cousin Reine when I beg you to stay at the Chase for a few nights at least. She can't very well be left alone here. And although I am quite an old gentleman compared to her—thirty-six—if I stay I am hardly an ideal chaperon—"

"Why should anybody stay?" Reine unexpectedly put in. "I don't in the least mind being alone."

"I quite understand how you feel about it, Captain Hatherleigh," Mrs. Osborne said, after a glance of strong disapproval at the girl. "And if my son wishes it I will put up with the trifling inconvenience to myself to oblige his patients who are in trouble."

"That is awfully good of you and just what I expected!" Torrens exclaimed heartily. "I cannot tell you how relieved I felt as soon as I saw you get down from Dr. Osborne's trap. Now, Reine, as one must eat even if one is unhappy, and it is nearly eight o'clock, it might be as well if you mentioned that there will be more guests at dinner."

"I will tell Mrs. Welfare, Captain Hatherleigh. And I must change my dress," Reine said, springing up.

He was quite authoritative, although so

friendly in manner. She could not help feeling bitterly that he was master of the Chase and in a position to give orders. But as he hurried to open the door for her he put his hand on hers for a moment as she passed out.

"I am Torrens to you, my dear child, not Captain Hatherleigh," he said.

There was nothing in the speech, of course.

It was semi-fatherly, and Mrs. Osborne could overhear it. But Mrs. Osborne could not see the look which went with it. Reine, although those gay blue eyes of his had been very near her own as Torrens lowered his head to look down into them, hardly knew what the look meant, and was equally astounded as furious when her heart began to beat at that and at the light, caressing touch of his fingers on her wrist.

She did not know him: he had a bad character—Dad had said so. And with her father just dead in that horrible way she deserved to be whipped for letting any man interest her.

It was only that she had never seen anyone quite so good-looking or so well dressed, and that he was a Hatherleigh, and reminded her of her father.

For he was there to turn her out; and to hear him buttering that "papa-potatoes-poetry-prunes-prism old lady" was sickening!

He was a flirt, of course. All the Hatherleighs were flirts, it was said. Her father wouldn't have him near the Chase, and it was talking to him which upset poor Dad and killed him.

She was sorry she had to meet him again.

If he looked at her like that and touched her, he would make her "nervous." No man had ever done that before. She wished he and the

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If he looked at her like that and touched her, he would make her "nervous." No man had ever done that before. She wished he and the

old lady would go away together. The only person she, Reine, felt she wanted was Bob.

Bob never made her nervous and always understood. Young and inexperienced as she was, she knew that Bob loved her, although how deeply she never guessed. She felt at her ease with him, safe and happy. Never had she felt a greater liking for Robert Osborne than at that moment when, for the first time, a feeling of more than liking for another man crept into her heart.

"Shan't have a chance of speaking to Bob alone with those two there," she told herself while her wizened little elderly maid, Esther Yeo, changed her riding dress for a white blouse and skirt. "I feel as though food would choke me, and if that ogling, blue-eyed thing sits down in Dad's place I shall want to throw my plate at him. Esther, it's awful to think this place won't be our home any more, isn't it?"

"But surely the Captain will let you stay in it, miss, if you want to. Such a handson well-spoken gentleman as he seems."

"I believe I have to go off to live with some old cat in London. Poor Dad! If he'd ask me—Give me some water to bathe my eyes Esther! I'm crying, and ashamed of it!"

Dinner was not a festive meal. Reine, who looked a lovely overgrown child in her short-skirted white silk frock and white muslin blouse, with a black ribbon round the neck as sole ornament, ate very little and spoke not a word, and Dr. Osborne was equally taciturn.

Mrs. Osborne, who was intensely shocked because her young hostess had failed to discover an all-black costume, indulged in polite small talk with Captain Hatherleigh, who pointedly

avoided taking his dead cousin's place at the table, and all four felt glad when the meal was over.

At its conclusion Reine rapidly excused herself to Robert's mother, and went up to her room. Mrs. Osborne, tired with travelling, followed her example, and the two men were left together over their coffee and cigars.

Would there be an inquest, or would Dr. Osborne, as Sir John's medical adviser, certify the death as natural?

The doctor had ordered his trap to take him back to Merehampton at half-past nine. It was a quarter past the hour, and still Torrens was in ignorance as to the result of the examination.

"I could not speak of it before that poor little girl," he began at last, "but I thought Saturday would be the best day for the funeral. I have had a man from the village here about it, and have wired to a firm in Merehampton who will send over to-morrow. You have been intimate with the family. Do you know anything of my cousin's testamentary arrangements?"

"Wilbrahams & Co., of Chancery Lane, are the firm of lawyers Sir John has dealt with lately. Mr. Sidney Wilbrahams, the senior partner, was here last week."

"I suppose it would be advisable to send for him?"

"I have already done so."

"You?"

Dr. Osborne flushed slightly.

Captain Torrens was the perfection of kindly courtesy in his manner, and it was difficult to help liking him. Sir John had never had a good word to say about his cousin; but the fact that he was bitterly disappointed in having no

son might account for that. Robert Osborne was nothing if not fair: he hated to think he might be prejudiced against the new owner of the Chase on account of his attractive personality and his eligibility as a suitor for Reine.

A consciousness of guilt had misled Captain Torrens. Dr. Osborne did not connect him with Sir John's death, although there had been certain details concerning it which had puzzled him. He knew the late baronet to have been a headstrong man of violent feelings and small judgment, with a heart in so seriously diseased a state that any extremes of emotion might prove fatal to him. He had himself warned Sir John of his critical condition only a few days before. It was pure accident, so the doctor supposed, which had led to his death taking place in the presence of his heir. But the groom who had ridden to Merehampton to summon him had made no mention of Captain Hatherleigh's name, and Dr. Osborne had been moved by his interest in Reine to take certain steps on her behalf.

"Until I arrived here," he said, "I had no idea that any member of the family was present, Captain Hatherleigh. I therefore, before leaving Merehampton, telegraphed to Mr. Sidney Wilbrahams informing him of Sir John's death, and I also sent a message to the relative in whose care Sir John has placed his daughter till her majority—"

"Has Reine been left in someone's care? I knew nothing of it. I've been treated as a stranger here, you see, Dr. Osborne, for the sole reason that old Lady Hatherleigh, Jack's mother, liked me better than she liked her own son or her other nephew. And that they could neither of them forgive. I suppose Reine has

been left in the care of her uncle, Lord Newtown, of Larne Castle? He has married again, hasn't he? Some music-hall person. It's rather rough on Reine."

A servant entered at that moment to say that the trap was ready, and Dr. Osborne rose to go.

"Sir John did not choose Lord Newtown as guardian for his daughter," he observed. "He has put her in the care of Lady Elizabeth, widow of a cousin of yours, Major Hatherleigh."

Captain Torrens had risen with his guest, and was standing with his back to the candles on the table. On Dr. Osborne's words he made a sharp movement, and dropped the lighted cigar he was holding between his fingers.

He stopped to pick it up, and followed the doctor to the outer hall, taking leave of him with friendly politeness.

But when the trap had driven away the new owner of the Chase came slowly back to the dining-room, and filled himself for the second time that evening a glass of stiff brandy and soda, which he raised to his lips with fingers that shook a little.

"Elizabeth Hatherleigh, of all the people in the world!" he muttered. "It's like my confounded ill luck!"

CHAPTER IV

SAINT OR ACTRESS

"LADY ELIZABETH HATHERLEIGH, St. Ursula's Retreat, Chiswick, London.

"Sir John Hatherleigh died from heart disease at the Chase. Daughter alone. Solicitor Wilbrahams sent for. From Dr. Osborne, Merehampton."

St. Ursula's was the largest of the three "Retreats," under the management of Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, St. Winifred's, near Brighton, and St. Ethelberta's at Canterbury sharing her motherly supervision with the London house.

On the same evening when Dr. Osborne's message reached its destination Lady Elizabeth was absent. To aid her in her good works she kept two motor cars and two chauffeurs, who combined the duties with that of lodge-keepers. There was very little difference between the two cars, both being roomy, neat, and painted black; but there was considerable difference between the chauffeurs.

Both men had been engaged, it was supposed, for the same reason which prompted Lady Elizabeth to employ the women attendants at the Retreats: the badness of their records, and their earnest desire to earn their living honestly.

Silence reigned at the Retreats: one of the chief rules in force was that no questions were

to be asked of anyone, whatever their position in the house might be.

No novice would ever forget the beautiful symbolical portion of the entrance ceremony, at which, after a full and private confession to the Lady Mother, old letters and links with the outer world were delivered to her to be burnt, and the over-wrought or erring woman passed a sponge over the slate hanging in the great hall before assuming the silver-grey robe of Silence and of Penitence.

Two years later, the white robe of a life-long Sister of Peace could be adopted; and although the Retreat under its present administration had only existed for seven years, there were already over thirty Sisters, and at least twenty novices desirous of attaining the same distinction.

The chaplain and the chauffeurs were the only men permanently attached to the institution. The former was a dark-faced, ascetic-looking bachelor of forty, who was addressed as Father Paul, and was held in reverent awe by the inmates of the retreat. The others were respectively Timothy Lucas, a weak-faced, sandy-haired cockney, who had been frequently convicted of drunkenness and theft, and was now kept in a state of sad sobriety and honesty, and Harry Hunt, a hollow-eyed, black-bearded misanthrope with a perpetual scowl, who had hardly ever been heard to speak.

It was Hunt who drove the car on this particular evening. He was waiting in a line of vehicles outside a great house in a West-End square, from which the sounds of a band proceeded, and at which the brilliantly lighted windows, the marquee arrangement on the

balcony, and the red cloth on the doorway denoted an out-of-season festivity.

From time to time Lady Elizabeth, in the interests of her many charities, appeared at gatherings of fashionable folk. To-night, as always, she was the centre of observation wherever she moved.

"Poor dear Lady Betty! Twenty years ago she was one of the prettiest girls in London. She can't be more than two or three and forty. But what a wreck!"

"Why does she get herself up like a funeral mute?"

"Don't you know? Her father was the old Marquis of Kingsbury who ruined himself over gaming and betting, and her sister was the Lady Eveline Wendover who had to be put in a mad-house to hush up a scandal: her elder brother shot himself, and the younger got run in over that affair of Lady Calthorpe's necklace. Poor Betty married Major Hatherleigh and went with him to India: I dare say she was glad to get out of the family scrapes. I believe she adored her husband. He disappeared in some border raid eight or nine years ago, and since then she has given up the world and devoted herself to good works. She half-starves herself and wears sackcloth next to the skin, I am told. You must have heard of her Homes and Retreats and Rests and all that? She hardly ever speaks to a man, and really, if one didn't want to be unkind, one would say she had gone mad on doing good!"

That year the fashion in feminine array was a narrow skirt, an extremely low bodice, and an enormous puffed and curled coiffure. Among dozens of elaborately-painted, middle-aged women, with tired grey eyes, bare shoulders

hung with jewels, and clinging skirts of brilliant colours, there moved a slim figure in dull black draperies, unrelieved by the least ornament.

The gay crowd moved aside to let her pass like a cluster of peacocks scared by a raven. She took no heed of them. From the waxen pallor of her face her large hazel eyes stared out with absent-minded intentness. If addressed by her acquaintances she would stop for a moment, as though to withdraw her thoughts from the loftier plane to which they had fled, and then bend towards her interlocutor with a kind of forced graciousness, but, unless the topic of charity were approached, without enthusiasm.

Lady Elizabeth's appearance was extraordinarily impressive. She was not tall, yet many a tall woman looked insignificant beside her, so stately was her carriage. Her extreme thinness was accentuated by her plain black garments, and her dignity was enhanced by her widow's cuffs and collar, and by her singular headgear, a small cap of white muslin forming a Marie Stuart point in the middle of her forehead and completely concealing her hair, surmounted by a long black veil which flowed nearly to the hem of her gown.

Aloof from the world as she appeared, men had often wooed her during her widowhood. She was not beautiful: her face, until she smiled, was more like a wax mask of the dead than a living woman: her very lips were colourless, and there was no sign of warmth or life about her abstracted calm. Her smile was very rare and very radiant: she hardly ever used it except to repay some generous donor to one of her pet schemes. Men she deliberately avoided: as a result, they were as a rule anxious

to know her. Their attentions she ignored, and their offers of marriage she received with a pained disgust.

"My love was given to my husband, and my life is given to the poor and suffering," she would say.

Low Church people hardly approved of her Convents and Retreats; but she met their objections eloquently.

"I believe it right to borrow what is good from all denominations," she argued. "There are many of my sisters among the rich and poor who want a home where they may rest and work and pray together under one loving mother's care: I give up my time to mothering such women. I love my Church and work for it. If my ways of work are a little out of the common, they are none the worse for that. If I go among worldly friends it is to gain help for the helpless, and if I dress strangely, it is to mark out my motive, and because I cannot spend on vain decoration money which may bring happiness to my poorer friends."

She was becoming an institution in London, and the fashion. Women worshipped her from afar, as it was in the highest degree difficult to become intimate with her, and men and women alike were rather afraid of her.

As she passed down the crowded rooms that evening a clever, bitter-tongued Colonial Minister, who saw her for the first time, summed up his impression of her thus:

"She is either the greatest saint or the greatest actress this generation has known."

Her one great gift of music she never exercised except for charity. She was an admirable performer at the piano, and evolved from that unresponsive instrument sounds of

extraordinary sweetness. Good music was the one relaxation she allowed herself, and into her dark eyes, as she listened to a true artist, tears would sometimes gather. But such signs of emotion she seldom showed.

At midnight she was leaving the reception, which had been given by the wife of the Leader in the House of Commons in honour of certain distinguished Colonial visitors. She was satisfied with her evening's work. She had been able to talk of her pet schemes to more than one person of wealth and importance, and had gained a valuable recruit for her homes.

"Dear Lady Elizabeth, I am sick to death of society. I want to live and look like you. Only tell me: if I enter one of your Retreats, can I ever come out again?"

The speaker was a plain, elderly heiress. Lady Elizabeth smiled at her kindly.

"Of course you can come out, dear friend. Do I look like a goaler, to retain people anywhere against their will? I try to bring rest and solace, not imprisonment, to those who suffer. Come to me as my guest for a while. I will soon find for you an interest in life."

"How awfully good of you! I am weary and bored with everything. When can I come?"

"To-morrow I shall expect you to lunch at Chiswick, and you shall stay just as long as you like."

Five minutes later Lady Elizabeth entered the black motor car and started on her return journey.

The light fixed in the back of the car fell on her pallid face and revealed the expression of irritable weariness which clouded it. The saintly calm had vanished; but, bored and annoyed as she looked, her countenance was

more human than it had appeared at the reception. She looked younger and more like a living woman than a sculptured saint as she fidgetted in the car, rapping with her fingers upon her knees, and murmuring under her breath little expressions of vexation.

"Why not have come? There will be some excuse, no doubt! More lies, more lies! The same thing always! I am a fool to care!"

At last she tossed her head and gave her whole figure a quick shake, as though to fling off physically her disquieting fancies. Then she withdrew a small key from a compartment fixed to the lining of the car, and unlocking a case beneath the seat, drew out a paper-covered French novel and proceeded to read it.

The volume was new, but the pages were carefully cut. It was the last and most daring work of a Parisian writer, known for his unconventional stories. Possibly by force of contrast with her own conventual existence, Lady Elizabeth speedily became absorbed in the book, and hardly raised her eyes from its pages before the car came to a standstill in front of the lodge gates of a vast and gloomy looking red-brick building, set back in a stone-paved courtyard about a quarter of a mile from the river bank at Chiswick.

"Harry Hunt," the chauffeur, came round to open the door of the car. He and Timothy Lucas divided the duties of minding the lodge and guiding the motors. Hunt despised Lucas and hardly deigned to address him, and Lucas feared Hunt only a little less than he feared his mistress. Between the moral influence of the two he had been kept comparatively honest and sober for two years; but the strain upon the little demoralised cockney was great and now

and then showed signs of becoming too much for him.

As Hunt opened the door Lady Elizabeth put down her book with a sigh of regret. Then she looked up at him and smiled.

"It's awfully amusing," she said, "even better than the last you got me."

"I glanced through it and thought you would like it. What sort of time did you have this evening?"

"Oh, the usual thing. Silly women, heavy men."

"Did you do any good?"

"Yes. Subscriptions promised from really solid people for the Work Girls' Playhouse, the Children's Toy Palace, the Rescue Home, and other things."

Hunt paused by the door while Lady Elizabeth gathered together her gloves and note-book.

"You really do a lot of good, you know," he remarked.

His tone was that of an educated gentleman, and his manner towards his employer was that of an equal, but marked by an affectionate reverence.

"A little," she said thoughtfully. "At least, I try to. But now and then life gets sickening."

"Something has put you out to-night, I can see."

"No. I am quite satisfied. Miss Ellen Pettigrew, the coal heiress, is coming here to-morrow. She is devoted to me, and has more money than she knows what to do with."

"What went wrong, then?"

"Nothing, Nevil, nothing!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That means you won't tell me. Do you suppose I can't—

"Please don't guess!" she said with a note of sharpness in her voice. "And before you open the gates, go into the lodge and get any letters there may be for me.

Hunt obeyed, and returned with a bundle of letters and the telegram from Dr. Osborne. He then threw open the gates, and was about to take his seat when Lady Elizabeth, who had opened the despatch, called him back to her.

"Extraordinary news," she exclaimed. "Jack Hatherleigh has died of heart disease."

"Your husband's cousin?"

"Yes. He wasn't old, either. Very little over fifty."

"You and he were good friends, weren't you? Will he leave you anything?"

"He will leave me his daughter, I am afraid, until she is twenty-one."

"Rich?"

"About five thousand a year, I believe, from her mother. I have never seen her, and I have already too many women to look after. I am told she is a terrible tomboy."

"I will back you to tame her," he remarked, with a dry laugh.

"It's a bore, all the same. I have so much on hand just now. I suppose I must go and fetch her. But I can't possibly go to-morrow, with Miss Pettigrew coming. I must draft a telegram for you to take, saying how sorry I am. Drive me in now, please!"

He lingered by the door of the car a moment longer.

"Isn't Jack Hatherleigh's Devonshire place entailed? And doesn't it go to that unutterable scamp, Torrens Hatherleigh?"

At the name Lady Elizabeth's whole face changed. The colour rushed over her cheeks and brow, and her faintly marked eye-brows contracted in an angry frown.

"I have told you before," she said, "never to speak that man's name in my presence! Do you think I can forget his scandalous conduct in India years ago and the grief he caused to my darling husband?"

"All right! I forgot. Sorry!"

The dark-bearded chauffeur sprang upon his seat and guided the car to the front entrance of St. Ursula's Retreat.

Four hours later, at the breaking of a chilly London dawn, a slight, black-haired lad, with cunning eyes set too close together, and strong, thin hands with crooked fingers, halted in front of the lodge-gates of St. Ursula's Retreat, and looked at an address scrawled on a dirty piece of paper which he took from his pocket.

"Looks like a goal," he reflected. "But if the mistress of this blooming amateur work-house is such a balmy idiot as to lodge and feed Uncle Tim, and pay him well for driving a car and taking care of the gates, she ought to find easy employment for a clever lad like me, as doesn't drink or thief more than is absolutely necessary, the whiles I am lying in wait for my next protector, Captain Torrens Hatherleigh!"

CHAPTER V

THE CHASE

"I MUST go for a ride. I shall die outright if I don't."

Reine Hatherleigh leaped out of bed at four o'clock in the morning of the fourth day after her father's death.

The intervening period had been an ordeal for her. Mrs. Osborne, who at Sir Torrens' earnest request had agreed to remain at the Chase until after the funeral, tried Reine's patience to the uttermost.

In contrast with her, Torrens seemed gentle and charming; but there was no blinking the fact that he devoted himself to the elder lady and not to the younger.

"Except that she was older, you remind me so wonderfully of my mother that I feel we are related," he declared to Mrs. Osborne. "She died when I was nineteen. She was as pretty as a little fairy when a girl. I must show you her portrait some day."

"We certainly seem like old friends," Mrs. Osborne returned, in a flutter of pleased vanity. "But you are too complimentary about my age, Sir Torrens. My elder boy, who is in holy orders, is nearly thirty-five."

"You must have been married out of the nursery!"

"I was but a girl, certainly. But my parents prepared us early for the responsibilities of life.

There was no scampering about the country on horseback for us. In my mother's time womanly women were in fashion, and I have endeavoured to rear my own dear girls in her spirit."

"I am sure they ought to turn out well if you brought them up. That's what girls want; a real mother. And men want one, too. Even more, perhaps, than women."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Sir Torrens. My elder boy, Anthony, was hardly ever away from my side, and consulted me in everything. It was my wish that he should enter the Church like his grandfather. His father was a mining engineer and wished him to follow the same profession. Dear Anthony has a very slight lisp, and his father thought that might be against him in the pulpit. But I said no! Anthony has a beautiful nature, and where better could he show it than as a minister? What does a lisp matter if the spirit be there? He has never been inside a theatre or any place of amusement, and I always said his wife would be a happy woman."

"And is she?"

"She is, indeed. I had the joy of choosing her, a most sensible girl, with two hundred a year, not pretty, and a little older than Anthony, but devoted to the parish, and such an excellent manager! They have four little ones, and they live a beautiful life in their home at Ealing, and are greatly esteemed in the neighbourhood."

"And your other son, Dr. Osborne. Have you chosen a wife for him yet?"

Reine, who was standing by the window, staring out at the rain and playing with the blind-string, stopped fidgetting to listen.

"I hope I have," Mrs. Osborne replied. "That is one of the reasons why I have come to Merehampton. I am strongly of opinion that a general practitioner should be a family man. Robert has strange ideas in some ways; but I feel sure he will make an excellent husband. And now there is nothing to prevent him from settling down with the very girl for him."

"He has some one in his eye, then?"

"When he was walking the London hospitals he saw a good deal of a young friend of my daughter's, a Miss Kathleen Pringle. He had no home to offer her then. Now that he is settled here he has told me he is not well off enough to keep a wife. But Kathleen's father died a few weeks ago and has left her a nice little income. She is all that I could wish for in a daughter-in-law; modest, domesticated, fond of parish work, and really quite nice-looking. She is much attached to my son, so that nothing need stand in the way of dear Robert's happiness."

Mrs. Osborne was intentionally conveying the idea to her hearers that Dr. Osborne eagerly desired to marry the young lady from Gunnersbury with whom he had carried on a mild flirtation ten years before. As a matter of fact, she had not yet had the opportunity of mentioning the name of Miss Pringle to him to recall to his mind her long-forgotten personality.

Robert Osborne's confidence concerning his love for Reine Hatherleigh rankled in his mother's memory. She disliked the girl with a vehemence surprising in a woman who prided herself upon her Christian character, and she honestly believed that, in spite of her money and position, Reine would be a wholly

unsuitable wife for her younger son, even if he should venture to declare his affection for her.

"County family indeed!" she told herself. "Mrs. Welfare, the housekeeper, tells me the girl can't even spell. I'm sure her writing is a disgrace; when I saw it on an envelope it looked like one of Robert's prescriptions. A man's wife should be a helpmeet chosen from his own class, not a person who would look down upon him because she had more money than he. For as to family, my mother came from the Worthingtons of Worcestershire, and they were cousins to the Earls of Carnford, and quite above mere baronets in Devonshire!"

Torrens Hatherleigh, on the other hand, won the worthy lady's heart. His reputation, he frankly admitted, was not of the best; but had he been blest with a mother like Mrs. Osborne, who knows to what heights of saintliness he might have risen?

He showed a genial friendliness on the subject of Dr. Osborne's matrimonial hopes.

"Mind you invite me to the wedding," he said. "I am greatly impressed by what I have seen of your son; though how you can be his mother, looking as young as you do, I can't imagine!"

Reine had slipped out of the room, leaving them together, "buttering each other," as she mentally dubbed it. She felt oddly sore at heart over the news about Robert, whom she had come instinctively to regard as her property, her pal and chum, to whom she could fly with all her troubles, sure of sympathy and counsel. Without quite realizing it, she had grown to like him better than any living person, and although her affection was all friendliness, untouched by passion, it was both deep and strong.

"If Bob marries this beastly Pringle girl, I shan't have a friend in the world," she dismally told herself. "Dad was a pal, and my cousins who were drowned were pals, and Uncle Derrick was a pal till he married somebody I'm not allowed to meet. I'm not at all sure I like Torrens; he makes me feel uncomfortable when he looks at me, and I hate to see him taking dad's place in the old home, and the way he flatters that old lady is downright sickening! If Lady Elizabeth is anything like Mrs. Osborne I shan't be able to stand her a week!"

Three days of seclusion within four walls, three days of Mrs. Osborne's improving discourses to the accompaniment of the knitting-needles with which she was perpetually engaged in making woolly garments for the poor, had reduced Reine to a state of wretchedness which was new to her. Outside it rained almost without ceasing; indoors, black dresses, hushed voices, and a general air of sombre worry hinted at the tragedy which had robbed the Chase of its master. Singing, whistling, billiard-playing, novel-reading, or any kind of amusement was not to be thought of so long as that still figure reigned in the chief room. If Mrs. Osborne had known her father, Reine could have spoken of him to her; but Mrs. Osborne had never seen him in life, although her elevating homilies concerning his death were endless.

The fourth day was Saturday, and the funeral procession was to leave the Chase at half-past twelve. Lady Elizabeth had telegraphed her intention of being present, and of returning to London with Reine.

London and Lady Elizabeth for a girl brought up on the moors for all the part of her

life when she had not been running wild in a tumbledown castle on the coast of Ireland!

Reine was not of the weeping sort, and usually slept like a baby after her daily exercise on foot and on horseback. But the night before the funeral she lay awake and cried bitterly.

"Dad dead! Turned out of the Chase! Three days indoors! London! Lady Elizabeth! And my dear old Bob going to get married!"

The combination of misfortunes was heart-rending.

"If I can't have a last scamper on the moors before I go to prison with Lady Elizabeth I shall go raving mad," murmured Reine, as she thrust her long slim feet into her riding boots. "Nobody will be up to see me and be shocked at this time in the morning. I'll saddle the horse myself, and have a couple of hours' gallop on Dartmoor, to put a little heart into me before they hide my poor old dad away under the ground!"

A chilly mist hung in the air, blurring the familiar outline of the stables. Suddenly, as she made her way into them, the feeling of desolation which had oppressed her since her father's death deepened in Reine's heart until it became almost anguish.

She could have moaned aloud as she slipped the bolt on the door and entered the portion in which Thelma, Bessie, and several other hacks and hunters were stalled. The very scent of the place was dear to her. Reine detested perfumes, and genuinely considered that the smell of a well-kept stable, straw, hay, and clean horseflesh mingled, was the most delicious in the world.

There was not an animal there which did not know her tread, and prick its ear at the sound. She loved their satin-smooth skins and arched necks, and was more interested in their varying characters, as expressed in their eyes, nostrils, and general bearing, than in the differing individualities of her fellow-creatures.

Even the stable cat, which awoke at her approach and leaped down from its bed in the manger to walk purring round her feet, was a well-loved friend.

What was to become of all these companions she did not know. She had been too proud to make inquiries; but from her maid's chatter she had learned a rumour that Sir Torrrens meant to sell the Chase.

It seemed too sacrilegious to be true. The mere doubt was a torture. Constantly her father had assured her that the place would always be her home, and that no one but a Hatherleigh should rule the Chase, even if it should ever come to be held by "a penniless scamp."

"Bessie and Thelma I'll keep, whatever happens. If I could live at the Chase with them and without servants, on a pound a week, I'd be happy!" Reine whispered as she saddled the bay mare, with tear-laden eyes. "Thelma I must take this morning, because losing Dad is worse for her; but they shall both come with me wherever I go. And while I have a struggle in me I'll not give up the old home!"

Before leaving the stable, Bessie had to be consoled, as she was evidently disappointed at being left behind.

"Don't you mind, old girl," Reine said, with her arm round the grey mare's neck. "I love

you best, as you know. But there is no one to ride Thelma now."

She led her father's mare into the lane immediately outside the stables, avoiding the avenue to the front entrance.

Half way up the lane, at a point where the clattering of hoofs would not be likely to awaken the sleeping grooms, she sprang on the saddle and made for the moors.

The cold wind dried the tears upon her cheeks, and the rapid exercise set her young blood circulating, and for a moment banished sorrow from her heart. It was not possible to let her mind dwell upon regrets and imaginings whilst riding Thelma, who for three days had missed her accustomed exercise, and showed delight by a series of back-jumps when her feet were set upon the heather.

Sir John's weight was needed to keep the mare in order. Reine's hands were long and strong, but she had all that she could do to prevent Thelma from "bolting." In spite of herself, the girl's eyes flashed with joy, and the dimples about her mouth showed in a happy smile as she felt the earth fly back beneath her horse's feet.

This was life, despite the fog which hid the valleys and rolled from the granite tors which crowned the hills, and the patches of bog swollen by the recent heavy rains, and the sharp stones which thrust their heads above the bracken and the furze; this was glorious life indeed, to be out here, free as air, between the sky and the great hill slopes, feeling one with the creature of life and movement beneath her, one with the purple and gold and red-brown and grey about her feet!

Suddenly Thelma stopped dead short in her

gallop, so unexpectedly that she would have unseated a less experienced rider. Her head was erect, her ears were pricked up: she was listening for some sound unheard as yet by Reine. A few seconds later the girl recognised it: the baying of hounds and the huntsmen's call.

In the trouble which had fallen upon her house she had neglected to take note of the date and the hour fixed for the meet, which had been at Rawstone, two miles away. The Master was a rich City man, barely on speaking terms with her father, who had quarrelled with him and resigned his membership of the hunt during the preceding season. Reine reddened hotly as she realized that instead of having the moors to herself she might at any moment meet the hounds and their following. There was only one thing to be done, and that was to return home as quickly and quietly as possible before any of those persons who were out cub-hunting on foot or on horseback should catch sight of her.

The yelping sound came nearer. All ahead, as she halted at the brow of a hill, was lost in thick grey vapour. Even while she was hesitating, wondering in which direction it would be wiser to escape, the wind veered round and the mist lifted. On a hill immediately to her right, divided from her by only a few yards of stone-strewn slope, the red coats of the Master and the huntsmen shone out in a ray of sun, which pierced the fog and showed the hounds pattering round the horses' hoofs, and, a little way behind, some twenty to thirty men and women mounted, and as many on foot, waiting for the sport to begin.

Vexed that she should have been discovered

thus at this unexpected hour, Reine turned Thelma's head homewards. But Thelma had her own ideas on the subject of turning her back upon a hunt. She moved along with a jerky, uneasy step, tossing her head up, worrying at the bit, and listening.

The sound she waited for came at last and echoed all along the vale. Before Reine could stop her, Thelma turned sharply round and tore along the slope after the hounds in full cry. Reine bit her lips with annoyance, and held in the mare all she knew. She had reckoned without her mount. The sinews of a Hercules were needed to keep Thelma back from the sport she loved, and Reine, who had never before hunted on her, realized that for a little while at least she must let her have her way.

To keep as far from the other riders as possible, to avoid acquaintances, and to take the first possible opportunity of turning Thelma back, was all that she could hope for as, with burning cheeks, she splashed through water-courses and along narrow tracks to the rear of the other riders.

In that part of the country long runs are the exception. The fox keeps as far as possible to the valleys, and it is customary for followers to "tack" from one elevated point to another of the moorland, and to watch for a chance of continuing the chase at close quarters.

At the first stop Reine was resolved that, willy nilly, Thelma should be turned homewards. She had neglected to provide herself with spurs, but she set her strong white teeth as the bay mare flew madly over the heather, and told herself that if her life depended upon it, she would be mistress in the next encounter of wills. Against her own wish, she had

revelled in the swift movement in the keen morning air. But the position was cruelly false. For Sir John's only daughter to be actually following the hounds on the day of her father's funeral was nothing short of a scandal, and—

"Reine! Reine! My dear girl, what in Heaven's name are you up to?"

A man's hand was laid on her bridle, and into her face Torrens Hatherleigh was staring, with a whimsical wonder and amusement in his blue eyes.

He was mounted on his chestnut mare, and wore a deep crape band on the arm of his coat. It angered Reine to see that, even while he spoke in tones of gravity, he seemed hardly able to control his laughter. Evidently he believed that her appearance with the hunt was intentional, and the girl was too proud to undeceive him.

"Take your hand off my bridle, Sir Torrens," she said, sharply.

"My dear child, for the honour of the family—"

"The honour of the family doesn't owe anything to you! Let my horse go!"

"You little spitfire, I insist on your coming back with me at once! You don't want to set all the county talking!"

"That's my business! I won't be interfered with by you!"

"By ——!" he muttered in a low voice, "I don't leave you until we are both back at the Chase!"

Hatherleigh obstinacy and Hatherleigh temper flashed from light blue eyes to dark blue eyes. Then Reine struck sharply at his fingers with her hunting-crop, and, tugging

hard at the curb, set Thelma rearing. A moment later, as Torrens' mare swerved aside, Reine started on a headlong gallop away from the hunt up a precipitous, stone-covered hill crowned by a massive tor.

Torrens was pale and swearing hard. His fingers tingled with the blow ; but the dare-devil blood which had made havoc of his career was up, and he would have risked anything on earth to be even with the girl who had insulted and defied him.

He at least had not forgotten his spurs. He drove them into the sides of the spirited chestnut he was riding, and the human chase began, Hatherleigh after Hatherleigh, scouring the moor at breakneck speed.

CHAPTER VI

WOOLING A TOMBOY

THELMA heard the hoofs of the chestnut tearing up the ground behind her. The bay mare knew the moor better perhaps even than did Reine; knew the treachery of those sudden patches of verdure interspersed among the uninviting furze and stones, and mistrusted the narrow streaks of water which glistened here and there below the heather.

Thelma was far too big for the true Dartmoor breed. She had been bought by Sir John as a two-year-old, and for five years had hunted and galloped in all seasons on the moor until she knew it almost as well as did Bessie, who was daughter to a Dartmoor mare.

To know Dartmoor is to revel in its crystalline air, to rejoice in its wide panorama of green hill slopes, to delight in its sombre richness of colouring; but the man or horse that ventures far into its solitudes must be wary of two foes—mist and bog.

Torrens was a fine rider; but his life had been chiefly passed in towns, and he had never ridden in the neighbourhood of The Chase, where even as a boy he had been a rare visitor. His chestnut mare was beautiful to look at and a good one to go; but her experience had been confined to hunting in a grass country and cantering in the Row. The

long-horned red cattle and the small, shaggy ponies which fled in a wild stampede at her approach were as new to her as were the stony tracks, the precipitous tors, and the shiny patches of black mud, oozing water, which impeded her flying feet.

Thelma, even in the heat of being pursued, knew where to veer and tack to avoid the bog danger, and Reine by instinct was always on her guard. She had seen more than once the bubbles of foul slime over the raised spot where a horse had sunk to death, and had been present when a farmer, returning from Merehampton "cider-logged," had gone out of his course and slipped from his struggling steed into the treacherous Barrow Pool, from which he was rescued, chilled to the bone and more dead than alive, by moor-men with ropes.

She and her cousin were not far from that same Barrow-Pool now, as their horses tore down the slope of a lofty beacon crowned by an irregularly-shaped cairn. Torrens was some way behind, his mare having more than once stumbled over boulders and been delayed by unexpected plunges into water. For twenty minutes neither he nor his kinswoman had drawn rein: both were as wildly excited as were their horses, he, set upon catching her up and leading her home in triumph; she, equally bent upon eluding him and returning to the Chase alone.

The man's fury and the man's spurs gave him the advantage. Reine was wilful; but Torrens, easy and charming as he appeared, had contrived all through life to get what he desired. The girl felt that he was gaining upon her, and that she would suffer anything rather than be dragged home like a captive by this

"wrong 'un" who was turning her out of her home.

Once again without warning a thick mist descended: Reine could hear the pursuing hoofs, but the pursuers were invisible. Laughing to herself, she turned Thelma sharply off to the left, and mounting by a path familiar to her, she skirted the dangerous Barrow Pool as nearly as she dared, knowing that over the hill beyond there was a short cut home.

The hunt had wandered away in an easterly direction and the sound of the chestnut's feet became lost. In the silver-grey mist which laid a clammy touch upon Reine's flushed cheeks an extraordinary silence prevailed. Thelma's pace slackened to a walk: it was necessary to pick her way carefully, with that bog of evil reputation so near that its miasma-like atmosphere hung upon the air.

"He'll never find me now," Reine assured herself. "By the time the mist clears Thelma and I will be half-way over the hill. And that confounded fellow won't be able to follow us, not knowing the way, and with the bog between—"

Suddenly her mischievous delight was checked, and the words of triumph she was murmuring half-aloud died upon her lips. She drew rein and listened anxiously, while Thelma, sharper of hearing and instinct, trembled with apprehension beneath her.

A sound of gurgling and splashing broke the stillness: then came a man's sharp cry for help, followed by the piteous sob of an animal in dire distress and fear.

Thelma seemed to know what had happened as Reine sprang from the saddle, and, bridle in

hand, began to cautiously creep in the direction of the sounds. She drew back and resisted, snorting and rearing.

"Keep still, you idiot! I want your reins more than I want you!" the girl muttered as she detached them from the terrified mare. Then: "Torrens!" she shouted with all the power of her lungs. "Is it you? Where are you? Get off and throw yourself flat, arms before you, holding the crop! Flat, do you hear? Don't stand on your feet or you're bound to sink. I'll come to you if it can be done! Answer me and let me know just where you are!"

"Here! It's I, Torrens! I'm sinking fast!"

The answer seemed to come from a good way off. Reine's bright colour fled as she heard it. All her feelings of annoyance and irritation were lost in an agony of apprehension for this fellow creature in danger.

"If I could only see!" she whispered with dry lips as she crept nearer and nearer to the yielding green swamp, the while she shouted encouragement aloud.

"Don't struggle! Lie flat! I'll get at you with my reins! Keep your head up!"

As if in answer to her unspoken prayer, a faint breeze rolled the mist away. In the middle of the treacherous bog she saw the heaving back of the chestnut mare, and her beautiful head, with bloodshot eyes and distended nostrils, struggling above the slime.

A little nearer to her, Torrens, in obedience to her directions, had cast himself face downwards upon the bog. He was striving not to fight, and to distribute his weight evenly upon the yielding surface: her heart went out to him for his pluck as she saw his face, a little drawn

and pallid at the close danger, break into a smile at sight of her.

"Beastly bore! Never mind, Reine! Don't think you can reach me. Good thing for you if I go under! The Chase—"

"Don't be a fool, Torrens! The ground's firm here. I've fastened these reins together and I mean to swing them to you. You must catch them!"

Her arm was as sure as a cowboy's and her strength little inferior. She hurled the leather thong out until it hit the marsh within a foot of Torrens Hatherleigh's head.

"Strap it round your shoulder!" she shouted. "And lie still while I pull!"

"I'm too heavy! It will kill you!"

"Stuff!"

She wound the reins round a boulder on the extreme edge of the bog to act as a lever, and setting her teeth, pulled with all her heart and soul.

The moisture ran down her face and hands: it seemed as though her back must break with the strain of the man's heavy body against it.

But Torrens helped his own salvation with extraordinary agility, making upward movements out of the mire. One last gigantic effort, and the girl fell in a heap by the side of the boulder, and lay for a moment, exhausted and helpless, while the man, coated with mud and soaked to the skin, scrambled to firm ground beside her, and knelt at her feet in passionate gratitude.

"You've saved my life! My poor darling, are you hurt? I was a brute to let you! Reine, my dearest sweetheart, look up! Open your eyes, or I shall think I have killed you!"

He caught her in his arms and bent his head

low over hers. The girl's cheeks, which had paled almost to the tint of death, grew rosy red. A shiver ran through her body: even in this moment of physical fatigue she was ashamed of herself because his touch sent strange thrills of delight through her. His face, flushed now with love and gratitude, and comely even through the mud splashes, was so close to hers that she feared lest he might kiss her. He had indeed every intention of doing so, lovemaking coming naturally to Torrens in his dealings with women.

But Reine would have none of it. Unexpectedly she sat bolt upright, and the next moment had leaped to her feet.

"Your mare!" she cried. "You're letting her drown while you talk nonsense! Stay here while I ride to a farm and get men with ropes to drag her out. Give me the reins! Quick!"

"But you have lost your horse—"

"I'll soon have her back!"

She put her hands to her mouth: in a few seconds Thelma was cantering back towards her. Disdaining Torrens' assistance, Reine saw to the bridle, and vaulting into the saddle, tore away westward, hatless, with her short curls flying, like a young Amazon in full chase.

"Move about!" she shouted over shoulder. "That bog water chills to the bone!"

He stared after her a moment, half-angry at her boyish curtness. But her advice was sound, and he followed it, patrolling the heather sharply, and calling out words of comfort to the frightened chestnut, which was still making frantic plunges in the engulfing mud.

"Quiet, poor beast, quiet! We'll get you out! She'll get you out, bless her! What a girl! What a tomboy! I'd like to tame her!"

Pretty as a picture, too. And five thousand a year. They must be blind fools in this neighbourhood not to have snapped her up already. By George, she has muscles, too—no ladylike drawing-room nonsense about her! Didn't think I could take to that type; but I've never met one like this. And a pair of eyes that might set any man's blood on fire. Wish I'd kissed her before she stopped me. Wonder how she would have taken it? As they generally do, I suppose—pretended to be angry, and then returned the kiss with interest.

"Quiet, old girl, quiet! You'll be all right soon!

"Sits a horse as if she were part of it, and as strong as she is slim and white. No paint or powder about her!

"Cursed ill luck that Elizabeth Hatherleigh should have the care of her!

"Wish I'd had time to make her fond of me before she turned into a nun in one of those Retreats.

"Five thousand a year isn't much; but Reine's almost pretty enough to make it worth while.

"It would be a fine revenge on Jack if I were to marry his daughter, who was too good to dine with me!

"Marry!

"If I dared!

"Well, I dare do most things I'm set upon, and if the girl goes on attracting me, who knows? I might finish in a worse way than that!"

While he waited the mist clouds drifted away completely, and the great hills, clad in purple and gold, lay before him, gladdened by soft autumn sunshine. Even the murderous marsh

at his feet was dotted by starlike white blossoms, and, but for the straining figure of the mare, would have added a picturesque patch of verdure to the scene.

Moorland landscapes inspired in Torrens none of the warm and homelike affection they awoke in Reine. Torrens wondered whether the shooting was good, and decided that it must be a "rotten country to hunt in." There was nothing of the poet about Beau Hatherleigh. For him the country suggested sport, the town dissipation, and a beautiful woman someone to make love to, or to utilise in the furtherance of his schemes.

He was not quite sure yet whether he should leave Reine alone, or whether he would find her sufficiently attractive to be wooed seriously.

A young Diana between two Goths she looked as she came riding back, on each side of her a cart horse bearing a farm labourer.

Torrens marvelled at the sense and spirit she showed. Though but a girl of eighteen, she gave the right directions, and the men obeyed them implicitly. But as soon as the panting and exhausted chestnut was brought to a place of safety, and the men busied themselves in unfastening the ropes with which they had caught her legs, Reine turned to Torrens with an air of distant dignity.

"You had better go with her to the farm, Sir Torrens. They will know how to treat her and you too. Take care not to stand about and get a chill. I must be off home. Good-bye!"

She had gained her point of returning to the Chase alone, and Torrens could scarcely grudge her the victory, since she had saved the lives of himself and his horse.

Her cavalier treatment piqued his vanity and doubled her attractions for him. He was not used to indifference from women, and he began to resolve that he would change it into something far more soft and yielding.

The funeral had been fixed for one o'clock at the church of South Moreton, and the start of the procession at half-past twelve, to suit the convenience of Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, whose train did not arrive at Merehampton until nearly eleven o'clock. Torrens hated the thought of having to meet the saint-like lady; but he realised that it was impossible to avoid doing so, since the arrival of her telegram.

He looked at his watch as he dismounted from the farm-horse he had borrowed at the stable-gates of the Chase.

It was eight o'clock. There were still four hours before Reine's guardian could arrive from Merehampton. If he could get the girl alone, and express his gratitude and devotion as well as he knew how, he might make an impression upon her heart which no absence and misrepresentation could efface.

He was none the worse for his immersion. A stiff glass of grog, a suit of borrowed clothes, and a rough gallop on a cart-horse had warmed his blood, and "wrong 'un" as he was to the bone, Torrens Hatherleigh felt alive and keen after fresh mischief.

Breakfast in the low-roofed, oak-panelled room used for that meal was laid for two only. Mrs. Osborne, who presided at the coffee urn, heard with astonishment his tale of adventure.

Was it possible that Miss Hatherleigh had gone out for a ride on the morning of this day, of all days.

How heartless! How horrible!

"It was very lucky for me, all the same," Torrens said. "For she most undoubtedly saved my life."

He told the story of her achievements, and told it so well that Mrs. Osborne could not fail to be interested and excited.

"On my honour," he concluded, "if I were a better fellow, more worthy of her, I mean, I would ask that splendid girl to marry me!"

Mrs. Osborne was of opinion that this was carrying gratitude too far. She was sure the whole thing came quite naturally to Reine; there are some advantages in being brought up like a stable-boy.

"Spiteful old cat!" Torrens mentally reflected. Aloud he asked her where his cousin was, and learned that she had breakfasted in her own rooms, and was now engaged in going all over the Chase to "say good-bye" to the place, after placing a wreath on Sir John's coffin.

"Poor little girl!" he observed as he lighted a cigarette after breakfast. "I must see if I can find her and cheer her up a bit."

In the hall he came across Jackson, Dr. Osborne's man, who had left his horse fastened to the gates of wrought-iron on the other side of the courtyard. The man had brought a letter addressed to Miss Reine Hatherleigh, and was looking for a servant to whom to deliver it.

Torrens saw the address in Dr. Osborne's clear writing.

"Is that a note for my cousin, my man?" he inquired. "My name is Torrens Hatherleigh. The servants to-day are too busy to know what they are doing. I will give it to her myself, if it be important."

"Thank you, sir. It is from my master, Dr. Osborne. He can't come to the funeral, and is anxious that Miss Hatherleigh should know why."

Torrens took the letter, and in the adjoining room opened it as unconcernedly as he had torn the envelope of that letter from "Mrs. Willie Devereux" to the late Sir John, which Barney Lucas had seen him read.

"MY DEAR CHILD,"

"Please forgive me if I do not appear at the ceremony this morning. All my heart and sympathy are with you. But I shall not be able to leave my house. There has been a serious motor smash in Merehampton, and Mr. Holman Buckworth, a young Australian, is in this house, lying between life and death. His father is watching him with me. It is a bad business, but I hope I may pull him through. Did you know your father has made me one of your trustees, the other being Mr. Sidney Wilbrahams? If it be true that you start this afternoon on a visit to Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh in London, ask her if you may call at my house when you pass through Merehampton. It is most necessary that I should see you, and I want to know her too. Apart from any business, dear Reine, give your faithful old friend a few minutes to say good-bye.

Yours ever,

ROBERT OSBORNE."

"The fellow's in love with her! I guessed it!" Torrens observed as he thrust the letter into his pocket. "For the credit of the family I'm not going to stand by and see five thousand a year and such a pair of eyes thrown away on a grey-headed gallipot! I'll force the pace a bit!"

In the billiard-room he found her. It was in the oldest portion of the house, a long, low apartment, which had once been the sleeping place of the lords of the manor, panelled

throughout in roughly-hewn oak, and roofed with oaken rafters. The billiard-table and its accessories were the only modern objects in it. The light came through oblong windows divided into many tiny panes, and the chimney-place was vast enough to warm a dozen guests at close quarters.

Wood logs were burning in it, piled high on the dogs, and before the fire an arm-chair was drawn, in which sat to all appearances a handsome young man, with feet in riding-boots outstretched towards the blaze, and curly dark head bent in melancholy thought.

It was Reine; she had not yet changed into her attire of conventional mourning. Sir Torrens, watching her from the door, was half-inclined to burst into a fit of laughter.

How in the world, he asked himself, was a man to make romantic love to a girl who looked for all the world like a boy?

CHAPTER VII

ROUTED

MRS. OSBORNE, left alone behind the silver coffee urn in the breakfast-room, glanced about her critically.

The Chase was much too large, she decided, and the service was abominable. There was dust everywhere, and the tablecloths wanted mending. Mrs. Osborne objected to the narrow leaded window panes, and would have liked to cover the ancient panelling with whitewash, or some "nice cheerful wall-paper."

In her heart she longed to be back at "Parkside," Gunnersbury, mildly bullying her two neat little servants, and bestowing good advice upon her three plain but cultured and serious-minded daughters.

Torrens had lowered himself in her estimation by speaking so warmly of Reine; and Mrs. Osborne was engaged in wondering what he or her son could see in "an overgrown gawk, absolutely without feminine charm," when the door opened to admit Mr. Horrocks, the butler, superb in his new mourning, but looking unusually excited.

"I beg pardon, ma'am, but her ladyship has arrived!"

"Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, do you mean? She was not to be in Merehampton before eleven!"

"Her ladyship travelled from town last

night, ma'am, as the train started so early. She is in the large hall. I don't know where Miss Reine and Sir Torrens are—"

"Find them and inform them, please! I will join Lady Elizabeth at once."

Mrs. Osborne "loved a lord" as much as do most English people. She was full of interest and curiosity on the subject of the Marquis of Kingsbury's celebrated daughter, reports of whose saintly life, in contradistinction with the scandalous conduct of other members of her family, had penetrated as far as Gunnersbury.

As the daughter of a Low Church clergyman, Mrs. Osborne was inclined to think that some of Lady Elizabeth's institutions savoured of Rome, were the tales concerning them true. She somehow expected to meet a portly, grey-haired lady of her own age, and of fussy dignity: what she did not expect to see was the slight, erect figure which stood motionless before the open fireplace in the great hall, in clinging black draperies and strange Marie Stuart cap and veil, wearing over her shoulders a superb cape of ermine no whiter than her wax-like face, the sombre eyes in which were lowered on the glowing logs.

Mrs. Osborne was a person of considerable importance in her own imagination and in her own neighbourhood; but this pale and shadowy woman, but little taller than herself, with aloof manners and absent-minded expression, contrived to make her feel small.

"Mrs. Osborne? Ah, yes! I think some relative of yours sent me this," Lady Elizabeth said, as she held out Robert's telegram in a slender and beautiful white hand, set off by deep cuffs of lace-edged muslin.

"It is from my son, who was medical

adviser to the late Sir John, and a great friend of his."

"Is your son here?"

"No; but I expect him for the funeral."

"And Reine: where is she?"

"Sir Torrens went in search of her about ten minutes ago, Lady Elizabeth."

"Sir Torrens?"

Lady Elizabeth repeated the name sharply. There was a note of challenge in her voice. After a moment's pause she spoke again.

"Is that gentleman going to be present to-day?"

"Sir Torrens was with his cousin at the moment of his sad death. He sent for my son, and he also asked me to stay here until after the funeral. It was not altogether convenient for me," Mrs. Osborne added, getting on her dignity, "but my son had been so friendly with the late Sir John that I felt I could not refuse."

"Do you wish me to understand that this—Captain Hatherleigh—" Lady Elizabeth uttered the name with obvious reluctance—"was here in the Chase with my husband's cousin at the moment of his death? Forgive me for making a point of this, Mrs. Osborne; but I have reason to know that for very many years Sir John held no communication with him."

"He was here by Sir John's express invitation," Mrs. Osborne said, feeling secretly proud that she knew more about recent events in the Hatherleigh family than did this cold and haughty lady. "And they were, I believe, talking over business matters when Sir John had a heart attack and died."

Lady Elizabeth faced Mrs. Osborne while the latter was speaking and watched her

narrowly. She had a trick of setting her face "at attention," and of so concentrating the gaze of her dark eyes upon a speaker that the effect was magnetic. It was as though, by her intense stare and by the set fixity of her countenance, she would draw out the whole truth.

Even Mrs. Osborne, who was not lacking in self-possession, began to feel uncomfortable.

"You will be wishing to see Miss Hatherleigh," she said. "I will try to find her for you."

"Thank you. I know my way about this house: I was here as a girl. I will myself find Reine."

She swept out of the room in her long black gown, for even in travelling Lady Elizabeth never appeared in a short dress, and Mrs. Osborne drew her breath more freely when she was gone.

Major Hatherleigh's widow appreciated the charm of the old manor house as neither Mrs. Osborne nor its present owner, Torrens Hatherleigh, could do. She paused once or twice as she passed through the narrow, panelled passages, and lingered before one of the windows, set deep in the massive walls, to gaze across the terrace of grass on the flower-garden at a lower level, and beyond the oaks and ash-trees which sheltered the stables on the outline of Dartmoor, half-veiled in mist.

Her face looked stern and anxious. She drew a long sigh as she touched the worm-eaten wainscoting lovingly with her thin fingers.

"It might have been mine!" she whispered to herself.

Had Major Ronald Hatherleigh lived, the Chase would have been his property, as he

would have been the last of the entail, and what was his was even more his wife's, for Ronald's devotion to the beautiful "Lady Betty" had been a proverb.

She walked on very slowly, seeming in no way anxious to find Reine. She had indeed almost forgotten the object of her search when, as she softly opened the billiard-room door, for Lady Elizabeth's movements were singularly noiseless, the sounds of a man's and a woman's voices raised in excited discussion brought her to a standstill.

"You darling girl!" the man was saying. "It's of no use trying to keep me at a distance. You like me a little, I know. Else why should you have saved my life?"

"I did as much for your horse. Keep your hands off me, Sir Torrens! I hate to be touched!"

"You must get used to it from me, dear. I really love you, and we are going to be the greatest friends—"

"Friends with you! I hate the sight of you! Dad couldn't bear you, and it seems I've got to turn out of my dear old home for you—"

"Then why don't you take the home and me with it? Come: make a bargain. Torrens and the Chase, and a kiss to seal your promise—"

"If you dare to kiss me I will strike you and hurt you—"

"Not if I imprison those dear little hands—"

"They're as large as yours!"

"Perhaps they are! But I will kiss them, and you too—"

"Reine Hatherleigh!"

Sharp and cold as a glacier, the words reached the two. The girl had sprung from

her chair, unnerved and really angered by the man's sudden courtship, and was holding him off with all the strength she possessed, while Torrens flushed and handsome, with something like the true love-light shining in his blue eyes, was striving to clasp her in his arms.

Never yet had Reine seen any face change as did that of Torrens at the sound of Lady Elizabeth's voice, and the sight of her black figure in the doorway.

His jaw dropped, and his hands fell away from her as though he had been stricken with paralysis.

Not a word did he speak as his cousin's widow advanced slowly up the room, and held out an icily cold hand to Reine.

The girl took it mechanically, and dropped it at once. The touch chilled her. Reine was a straightforward, sensible girl, badly educated and destitute of book learning; but like many people who live open air lives, she had keen instincts.

Lady Elizabeth's apparition had not agitated or particularly surprised her, and she was the better able to note the effect it had upon Torrens.

To her amazement she saw that he was moved out of himself, and that the hand with which he began nervously stroking his moustache was trembling violently.

His eyes were fastened on Lady Elizabeth in a furtive, frightened way.

After seeing his courage in the face of death, Reine had great difficulty in believing Torrens to be a coward; yet she could not fail to see that he was afraid of this slender woman with the white face and the strange dark eyes.

As for her own feelings, Reine disliked her

new guardian on sight with the utmost heartiness.

There was something uncanny and ghostly about her.

"She looks as if she belonged to the Middle Ages and ought to go back and stop there!" was her unspoken comment.

"I have come earlier than you expected," Lady Elizabeth said, "because it was more convenient to stay the night at Merehampton. I remember you as a child of four: you have not changed much. Do you usually dress as a boy?"

Reine blushed hotly.

"I ride as a boy," she replied.

"Ah! You have been riding—to-day?"

"Yes."

"At what time do we start for the funeral?"

"At half-past twelve."

"It is now half-past nine. You will, I suppose, change your dress before we leave?"

A great desire to slap Lady Elizabeth came over Reine as she heard the cold, faintly satirical tones.

She did not yet seriously care for Torrens; but it annoyed her to be made ridiculous in his eyes.

"If you think it necessary, I will change my things," she said drily.

Then she added:

"I suppose you know Sir Torrens, and that I need not introduce him to you?"

For the first time Lady Elizabeth removed her eyes from Reine's face and fixed them upon that of Torrens, whom until that moment she had ignored.

Reine watched her.

What did that look mean?

It was not merely righteous anger at being forced to meet a man of bad reputation : of that the girl felt sure.

Fury blazed from the older woman's eyes, in which strange red lights flashed from the dark hazel. Her nostrils quivered and her pale lips moved. It seemed to Reine that they were uttering a curse too terrible to hear.

She appeared to gain in size and power by that long regard. Reine could hardly turn from it to note its effects upon the man. When she did so, she was scarcely surprised to see that Torrens, dashing, irresistible Torrens of the high spirits and lady-killing charm, appeared crushed and frightened.

His self-possession had deserted him together with his airy, ingratiating manners. He bowed awkwardly to Lady Elizabeth, but avoided meeting her eye after the first look interchanged between them.

It seemed to Reine that an interminable pause ensued before Lady Elizabeth spoke, still with her scornful gaze fixed on the master of the house.

"No, Reine," she said slowly, "I do not know Sir Torrens Hatherleigh. I have heard of him, and I do not wish to have any dealings with him. Nor shall you, while you are in my charge."

There was another long pause. Reine waited, hoping that Torrens would defend himself. But when he spoke it was with the timidity of a beaten child.

"I am sorry," he said, "that you have formed so bad an opinion of me, Lady Elizabeth. I hope I do not altogether deserve it. But as this house is mine—"

"My ward and I will leave it as soon as possible."

"Still, if there is anything I can do—"

"You can leave us, Sir Torrens!"

Even then he made no attempt to defend himself against her scathing contempt, but humbly bowed, and without one glance at Reine, walked out of the room.

Lady Elizabeth drew a long breath, and put her two hands on the girl's shoulders.

"Understand, my child," she said, "I should not be doing my duty by your dead father if I did not tell you that you must never speak to that man again!"

CHAPTER VIII

BARNEY'S FIRST MOVE

"WHY the — couldn't you learn to spell when you was at school, Uncle Tim?"

Barney Lucas, after eight days of "jollification" in London, was paying his second visit to his father's brother at the lodge of St. Ursula's Retreat, Chiswick.

The black-bearded, saturnine chauffeur, who styled himself "Harry Hunt," was out on some errand for his employer, Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, and it was the sight of that lady's name on some papers delivered at the lodge which excited Barney's indignation against his uncle.

"Hadley. That's what you put on the letter you sent me. And when you spoke of her, the other night, you called her Hadley, or 'Adley, as you ain't strong in your h's. And now you've just let out as she's lost a cousin as was a baronet in Devonshire."

"Well, and why shouldn't she?"

"If I'd ha' known, it might ha' made some difference to my plans."

"Plans!" repeated Timothy admiringly. "To think of a kid like you 'avin' plans. But you allus was a clever child, though you struck at training for an acrobat, like your poor dad."

"What did 'e get by it I arsk yer? Thirty-five years of 'ard work and next to no amusements, and then a broken back. Not

good enough, nunkey! To be an acrobat means denying oneself proper. And I ain't good at self-denial?"

"You 'ave done yourself tidy in the way of clothes," observed his uncle mildly. "Must ha' put by a good bit at your last shop, my boy, whatever it was."

"Neat ain't it, this soot?"

Barney turned round his slim figure to show off his latest purchase from a city tailor. He had taken Torrens Hatherleigh as his model, and wore a louder and cheaper version of what he remembered of that gentleman's riding clothes. His admiration of the Captain's appearance went so far that he longed to have a golden moustache to stroke, and something of Torrens' debonair charm of manner.

"My word, you must be flush of money to get yourself such togs!" Timothy exclaimed. "Yer own mother wouldn't know yer in 'em!"

"Where is the old girl, by the way?"

"Nanny? Oh she's pretty fit. She and her bookie have given yer plenty o' step-brotherses and sisters. They're around at all the race meetings as per usual. They've got a smart London address now in Seven Dials."

"P'raps I'll look her up some o' these days when I've had time to forget the wallopings she used to give me," Barney said thoughtfully.

The lad was too sharp to confide in his uncle. Thieving had come to him from the father's side of the family; but he placed no reliance on Timothy, who had never had the sense to keep out of the police courts.

"I've brought you something to cheer you," he added, as he drew a flat bottle of whiskey out of his pocket. "Now, mind you have the sense to hide it from that blackbearded chap as

drives the other car. If you wasn't such a softie, I could tell you something I found out about him the moment I set eyes on him."

"Tell your old uncle, Barney! How can I 'elp getting soft, with nothing to stiffen me up but tea and lemonade and such-like muck? This stuff of yours does good to one's inside!"

"Well, that chauffeur, as he calls himself, is a gentleman. I twigged it in a minute, although he tries to speak common, by the make of 'is 'ands and the way 'e 'olds 'imself."

"Bin in the army, more likely."

"A gentleman, I tell you; I know the brand. Wot's he up to here? Is he sweethearting the old girl?"

Timothy looked genuinely frightened.

"Shut your mouth!" he whispered, glancing nervously around. "You're too clever, that's what you are! Lady Mother ain't that sort. She ain't young, and she's ugly, and sorter like a spirit, and never looks at a man."

"Oh, stow that!" laughed his nephew. "Women are all alike. As to never looking at a man, she's got to look at me, and in double quick time. For I'm going in now to interview her."

"Thought you told me you wouldn't want any work found you for another week or more?"

"That was before I knew her name was Hatherleigh, and that she was a relation of that Sir John who died last week," Barney said with a mysterious nod.

He was young enough to be proud of having a secret, although he was too cunning to betray it to his weak-minded and bibulous relative.

Barney had been stable-boy at the Chase for eight months; but he knew very little concerning the late Sir John's family beyond the fact

that he had lost a cousin in some fighting abroad, that he had several "titled relations," and that he detested his heir, whose reputation justified his dislike.

Barney's thoughts were never long away from that smart, dashing figure he had watched from behind the curtain in Sir John's study.

At any moment he could recall it, and the easy grace of Torrens' attitudes, and the beauty of those well-kept hands, with which he had opened his cousin's letters, and mercilessly gripped his throat before holding a handkerchief to his mouth until the breath had left his body.

The man was a forger and a murderer; but, "hang it all, he was a gentleman!" was Barney's verdict.

Nevertheless, the lad was afraid of him and required time to tackle him. Sooner or later he intended that Torrens should pension him and provide him with all the luxuries in life he desired. It was true that he had gathered Torrens was in want of money. But if he was able to pay two hundred and fifty for a horse, and to live in the extravagant style alluded to by Sir John, and if, moreover, he intended to sell the Chase for "twenty or twenty-five thousand," then he would certainly be "good for" several hundreds a year to the clever lad who would hold him "in the hollow of his hand."

Meantime, Barney told himself that he must play a waiting game, and after he had flashed about London a little, and visited his favourite music-halls with congenial companions in his fine new clothes, he would seek some light, well-paid employment from Uncle Timothy's eccentric employer.

As his uncle's benefactress was a Hatherleigh, and actually related to his late master, was anything to be made out of her?

She was reported to do an immense amount of good in charity. To be charitable one must be rich, argued Barney. Would she, too, pay to stop his mouth?

Visions of a glorious future in which he, Barney Lucas, ran a roadside public-house near a race-course, and rose step by step on the profits of judicious blackmail until he owned race-horses and bullied his own numerous stable-hands, filled his brain as he passed through the lodge-gates, and sent in his name, with a respectful entreaty for an interview, as he was "in urgent want of help and work," to the Lady Mother of St. Ursula's Retreat.

Inside the great red-brick house there seemed to him to be endless passages, all bare flag stones and whitewashed walls and little prison-like doors. A harsh-faced elderly woman in grey led him into an ante-room, furnished with forms, devotional pictures, and a large bookcase filled with uninviting-looking volumes, and from this he was ushered, after a few minutes' waiting, into the presence of the "Lady Mother."

In spite of his cockney impudence, Lady Elizabeth impressed him.

The room in which she received him was panelled throughout with light oak. It contained a small organ, a carved oak desk on a dais near a massive fireplace over which a great cross was hung, and behind the desk an ecclesiastical-looking armchair upon which sat a white-faced lady in black, with tragic dark eyes.

Her manner to this horsey-looking youth was aloof and dignified.

What did he want? What advice did he need? And who had sent him to her?

"You must understand that it is women who need rest and comfort and employment that I help, not men," she said. "If you wish for advice, I will ask our chaplain, Father Paul, to see you."

"You have been very good to my uncle, my lady. He's here as chauffeur, Timothy Lucas."

"Is he your uncle? The poor man had two enemies; I do my best to protect him from them. You, young man, look quite able to find work for yourself."

"I am sorry to say, my lady, that thieving which maybe was one of Uncle Timothy's enemies, is in the family. I've tried hard enough to keep off it; but it's lost me one place after another."

"I am sorry it is not in my power to employ more men servants——" Lady Elizabeth was beginning when there came a sharp tapping upon the woodwork of the door.

A tall young girl in black entered, an unhappy-looking girl, with red rims to her dark blue eyes, and a tremulous quiver about her lips.

"Please, Lady Elizabeth, I want to speak to you! In fact, I must! I can't keep quiet any longer!"

"I am occupied, Reine, as you see."

"Then I'll wait and—why, it's Barney Lucas!"

"Do you know the boy?"

"Of course I do! He was in our stables at the Chase. That reminds me, Barney; wasn't there some story about you and the way you went away? What was it? Horrocks said he had locked you into the library just

before we found poor Dad. What became of you?"

Barney's colour changed.

"I was locked in, miss," he replied after a considerable pause. "It was through some mistake of Horrocks'."

"Then who let you out? Was it my father? Or was it Sir Torrens?"

Again Barney hesitated.

Then he answered in a low, shamefaced way.

"I was unjustly accused of theft, miss. So I jumped out of the library window into the stableyard and got clean away."

All the time he was being questioned by Reine he felt the gaze of the silent figure in the chair fixed intently upon him.

As the last words left his lips Lady Elizabeth broke in authoritatively.

"Leave us, Reine! Certainly I will hear what you have to say. But first you must let me finish my business with young Lucas."

Somewhat unwillingly Reine withdrew. The door had no sooner closed upon her than Lady Elizabeth turned to Barney. Her manner had altered. Her pale skin was faintly flushed, and those far away eyes of her's shone with suppressed excitement.

She pointed a denunciatory forefinger at the lad.

"You were lying just now!" she said. "Now you have got to tell me the truth!"

CHAPTER IX

BARNEY'S ENGAGEMENT

"Eyes like a gimlet, she 'as!" Barney reflected as he stood twisting his bowler hat in his hands before Lady Elizabeth's desk, after the manner of a criminal on trial before a judge.

"No, my lady, I didn't run away at once."

"Yes, my lady, I did 'ave a look round first."

"Yes, my lady, 'avin' that family temptation to thievin', I did lay my 'ands on several things which might be of value, papers and such like. Also cash; but I only took 'alf what I saw there."

"Yes, my lady, I did 'appen to be still in the room, 'idin' be'ind the curtain like, when a gentleman was shown in to see my master. And I saw my master join 'im."

"Yes, my lady, I 'eard every word as passed between them, and I could see them well, too, through the braid wot lined the curtains."

"Yes, my lady, I saw my master die. But it wasn't altogether in the way Dr. Osborne and the others thought."

"Murder? No, my lady, it wasn't exactly that! But it was uncommonly near it."

"Yes, my lady, I saw him knocked down and fall, and the other gentleman kneelin' on 'is chest while he was a shoutin' for brandy. Then at the end—well, I'd rather not say what I seed at the end! It makes me sort of sick to think of it. All I can say is: if my master

died a natural death, Nature was a good bit helped."

He had not meant to say half as much, although he wished Lady Elizabeth to know he had some hold upon her husband's relative. But she drew the truth out of him as a magnet draws a needle.

Afterwards, she sighed, closed her eyes, and leaned her head back for awhile against the red cushion of her high-backed chair. The light from a narrow window high up on the wall of the lofty room fell sideways upon her face. Barney began to tremble at her silence and her corpse-like pallor.

Was it possible that for the second time in a week he was shut in with the dead?

Cautiously the lad began to creep in the direction of the door. He was regretting with all his soul having ventured into this woman's presence. From his gipsy mother he had inherited a strong vein of superstition, and, to his way of thinking, this noble and benevolent lady, of whose lavish charity he had heard so much, was "fey."

"Stop!" said Lady Elizabeth as he stretched shaking fingers to the handle of the door.

"Beg pardon, my lady! I thought maybe I was disturbing you, and that you had gone to sleep—"

"I was thinking, praying," she said solemnly. "Barney Lucas, what you have told me is very terrible, if it be all true. No doubt the first part really happened: the servants at the Chase can be called to corroborate your words. But of the rest I am not so sure. Torrens Hatherleigh has a vile reputation. He has ruined the lives of men and women by his extravagance and his vices. I am ashamed to

think that he is a relative of my dear dead husband. But there is a difference between leading a fast and worthless life and indulging in brutal savagery. Why should Torrens Hatherleigh, who had not even seen Sir John for years, attack him, and fling him to the ground, and kneel on his chest, and practically murder him? There would be no sense in such a proceeding."

"Sir John worked on 'im and twitted 'im something awful, my lady. I don't know as I ought to give away family secrets; but I wrote down all I 'eard them say as soon as I was alone. And I've got the notes of it—and maybe some other sort of writings, too," he added in a lower voice.

Lady Elizabeth suddenly opened her eyes, and fixed them upon Barney with quite a benevolent expression in them.

"You are perfectly right in your speech about family secrets," she said gently. "And now tell me: to whom besides myself have you spoken of all this?"

"To not a soul up to now."

"Tell the exact truth, Barney. It will profit you to make a friend of me. But I must have no lies."

"I ain't a telling none, my lady. Sure as I'm alive I ain't told one word of it to Uncle Timothy at the lodge, or to any living thing. Uncle Tim don't even know my governor was a relation of yours."

"And why have you told me?"

"Well, my lady, I'm in want of a friend to start me in life, and you being a member of the family I thought you might like to know how I kept my counsel about the business. Because, you see, if I'd come forward at the inquest—"

"But you should have done so, if your story be true! she broke in, bending forward across the table, upon which she rested her elbows, with her delicate finger-tips touching above them, and speaking warmly. "Why should this dissipated spendthrift be allowed to go scot-free? Why should you wish to screen him?"

Then, as the boy in surprise kept silence, not knowing how to answer, she changed her tone.

"Unless indeed you held your tongue with the idea of coming upon him later for blackmail?"

"Blackmail's a hard word, my lady."

"Is it the right word?"

Barney fidgetted.

"I don't say I should refuse to be properly provided for, supposing a gentleman wished to make sure of my keeping quiet—"

"Yet even if you declared you had been hiding behind the curtains at the Chase because you were being sent away for theft, and that you saw two gentlemen struggling, and the one of them die, who would have believed you? You have no proofs, and you would harm no one but yourself."

"Suppose I know what the quarrel was about? Suppose I kept what the quarrel was for? Suppose I saw wiv my own eyes when Miss Reine sang out 'Let me in' outside the locked door, Torrens Hatherleigh hold his handkerchief over Sir John's mouth because he didn't die fast enough? Suppose I'd seen the Captain rummage in the governor's desk when he was dying on the floor for the very papers I'd got in my pocket, and wiv which I got clean away—"

"Where are those papers?"

Barney's eloquence was cut short by the sharp demand.

He shrugged his shoulders and passed a hand over his sleek hair. He was only fifteen, and he began to realize that he was no match for this experienced woman of the world.

"'Anged if I know, my lady," he murmured. "I come up from Merehampton by a workman's train, and fell asleep, and must ha' lost them on the way."

"Ah! Then the proof of all this extraordinary tale of yours is missing," Lady Elizabeth observed calmly. "Put it all out of your mind, Barney, and these cowardly ideas of levying blackmail. Some day wrong-doers are punished as they deserve. Meantime, you must work out your own salvation."

"Yes, my lady."

Barney began to move towards the door again. The last word suggested a sermon, and he was desirous of avoiding it.

"Give up thieving, give up spying, give up bad thoughts and vanity and laziness," she continued, "and since you have sought me out and want my help, I will give it. I believe there is a lot of good in you, Barney, and I will try to cultivate it. That is what I live for; drawing out of people what is best."

"Never seed anyone like you for drawing things out of people," murmured Barney.

A faint suggestion of a smile flickered at the corners of Lady Elizabeth's pale lips. It was clear that the compliment was more for her perspicacity than her morality.

"There are three bed-rooms at the lodge; you shall stay there, and help the women in the vegetable garden until I find you other work."

"Thank you, my lady. I'm not much of an 'and at gardening. Horses is what I am used to."

"You will do your best for the present with what I shall give you to do."

She touched an electric bell, and on the arrival of the grim-faced woman who had shown Barney into her presence, she wrote a note which she fastened in an envelope and gave to her.

"Take this boy, Barney Lucas, to the lodge," she said, "and give this letter to Harry Hunt. And please send Miss Hatherleigh to me."

She was leaning back again with her eyes closed when the girl entered.

It was impossible to imagine a greater contrast than existed between Major Hatherleigh's widow and his cousin's daughter. Even now, in a subdued mood after an unusual amount of crying, Reine was full of life and vigorous youth and freshness. Her slimness was that of a fine, muscular frame inured to incessant out-door exercise, and although her country colour had paled, her skin was pink, and her lips were red as they were soft and full. Her short, thick, blue-black hair curled naturally as it seemed with the very joy of living, and her Irish eyes were clear as those of a baby.

With her unusual height and broad shoulders, and her athletic strength of limb, she was the antithesis of the unnaturally pallid and calm lady, whose emaciated figure and hands, delicate as alabaster, suggested a faintly coloured statue rather than a creature of pulsating life.

There was, there could be no sympathy

between these two. Lady Elizabeth impressed the girl as unreal, her grace seemed mannered, and her very piety to ring false.

There was something behind her which Reine felt she did not understand. As to her exhortations, her talk of a saintly life apart from the world, and the spiritual grace to be obtained by lavishing money on the poor, they made no appeal at all to Sir John's daughter.

"I'd rather be as bad as they say Torrens is, and out with it, than fast, and wear out my knees praying. And as to passing my time singing hymns out of tune, and living with a pack of wicked-looking women who don't even speak to me, I'd sooner blow my brains out!" Reine decided.

She had endured it a week, feeling that for her dead father's sake she must "give it a trial." But now she had revolted, and she came to say so.

The sight of Lady Elizabeth's face, set at patient endurance, and her closed eyes, irritated Reine. She walked straight up to the table before her carved chair, and sat on it.

"I am sorry to disturb you, but I can't stop any longer in this house," she began.

Lady Elizabeth opened her eyes, and contrived to rob them of all expression as they rested on the girl's face.

"I think you had better call me 'Lady Mother,' as the others do," she remarked wearily.

"I don't somehow feel as if you were my mother—"

"That is quite natural."

"And I don't at all wish to do anything the others do."

"I fear there is not much Christian charity in you, Reine."

"I hope there isn't, if that is what this house is full of!" the girl retorted energetically. "Perhaps you can't see it, as you always seem to be thinking of something else, but I think the place is seething with spite and jealousy!"

"Reine!"

"I'm sorry, but I've begun, and can't shut up now. Even when they have to keep silence, the way the women look at each other makes one's flesh creep. At meals Miss Pettigrew and Miss Dawson, and the one they call Sister Emily, all show they hate each other because they're so jealous about you, and that hatchet-faced one called Agatha makes such grimaces at me whenever I try to speak that I can hardly eat—"

"Silence is our rule here, my dear Reine."

"That is just why I want to talk! Why did you bring me to such a place, Lady Elizabeth? I have been here a week, and except for pottering about the garden, I haven't had any exercise at all."

"The garden is large—"

"It is not as large as Dartmoor. My father spoilt me, perhaps, but I have been used to going in and out as I please, to climbing up Yes Tor before breakfast to get an appetite, to being on horseback at five and out cub-hunting—to living and breathing! Where's the sense in trying to make me live within four walls all day, with people who find their happiness in prayers and choirs, and confessions and services, and sewing and silence? Perhaps if I were made in a different way, or if I'd done anything very wicked, I might like it—one never knows! Miss Pettigrew says she is

sick of the world, and Miss Dawson says she is atoning; but I am not sick of the world, and I don't know that I have anything to atone for. Anyhow, I can't stand St. Ursula's. I am sorry to upset you, but I believe if I am asked to stand another week like this, I shall go mad!"

"And what do you wish me to do with you?" Lady Elizabeth inquired, in the tone of forced endurance one would use to a froward child.

"I want to go back home, more than I can tell you!"

"You forget that The Chase is no longer your home—"

"But Dad said it always should be. He swore it. Lady Elizabeth, I love every corner of it!"

"I am really sorry for you, my dear child. But beyond your personal belongings, which you will have to point out on some future occasion, The Chase and its contents are the property of your father's cousin."

"Is he living there now?"

"I cannot tell you. Why do you ask?"

"Because there was some talk of his selling it. I can hardly believe it, but I heard it rumoured."

"There is very little doubt that Torrens Hatherleigh will sell the property. He has no money to keep it up, and I have heard that he is a gambler, heavily in debt—"

"Then I must buy it! Lady Elizabeth, you must see I can't live anywhere else. I must see Torrens—"

"That I cannot allow! You can see the two gentlemen who are your trustees, and tell them of your wish. Personally, I hardly

prove of it. The Chase is far too large a house for a girl of your age. You are under my care until your majority, or until you marry, and certainly I could not allow you to live alone, nor could I leave my life-work to you with you in such an inaccessible spot. Why not resign yourself to a few years of self-denial and womanly occupations, and kindly charity and culture of the soul? You will be all the better woman for it at twenty-one, I assure you."

"It isn't a bit of good talking like that to me, Lady Elizabeth. I believe you know it as well as I do. I am aching to go home! I'll get The Chase if it is to be got, whatever my mother and Sir Torrens say. If I can't, then I must live on the moors and ride. As to remaining like this—well, I won't even try to!"

"What will you do?"

"Run away."

"To whom, pray?"

Something in her tone sent the blood hotly to Anne's cheeks.

"Should I tell you beforehand?" she asked

Suddenly Lady Elizabeth smiled, and her face was radiant and kindly. Leaning forward, she took one of the girl's hands in both her own.

"I have more feeling for you than you think," she said, with what appeared to be anxious affection. "I myself was young—years ago, of course. And I understand the wisdom of a conventual life for those who have no vocation for it. Listen, my dear! At the present you are better with me: believe me I am right. On the first occasion when we were all disturbed a scene which I cannot forget.

A man of atrocious reputation was daring to make love to you—on the very day of your father's funeral. You are too inexperienced to understand that an offer of marriage from a man leading such a life as Torrens Hatherleigh leads is an insult, and was not even meant to be taken seriously. Your father and I have been chosen by your father to protect you against such men. But I will not make your life too hard for you. If you cannot live without riding, you shall ride about the neighbourhood, and I will send your father's former servant, Barney Lucas, with you as groom. Will that arrangement please you?

"It will be much better than nothing," Reine acquiesced. "May I have Thelma and Bessie out of the stables at the Chase? They don't belong to Torrens Hatherleigh, even if their stalls do."

"Certainly you shall have them. I will give you all the needful directions. If you like you may come out with me in the motor, and I will telegraph about the matter to Mr. Williams, who is winding up your father's affairs. Put on your hat and put your hat on, and in ten minutes meet me at the lodge gates. Ah, and here is a letter I forgot to give you. It has the Merehampton postmark."

Reine recognized Robert Osborne's writing. She was surprised at the joy with which she saw it. She had been deeply hurt at his absence from her father's funeral and at the fact that she had received no communication from him. Her mother had parted from her with such marked coldness that she could not entrust her with a message for him. She had been too proud to write, even apart from the fact that she knew Reine was the worst correspondent in the

world, and spelt no better than a child of night.

She had thought often enough of Torrens and his love-making during the dull week she had passed at the Retreat. To remember it made her nervous," as she would have put it, and hotly ashamed of herself because she had been sharper with him. But in a very short time, if he kept out of her way and his personal magnetism could not help him, she would have forgotten him.

It was different with "Bob."

Bob had been her special "pal." She had loved her father, and they had been good sporting chums; but he had been a great deal away, whereas she had been in the habit of going over to Merehampton for a chat with the "pal" on every sort of occasion.

In all her small worries she had flown to "Bob," sure of his sympathetic affection and of his good sense; and his defection just at the moment when she had lost her father and her home had been bitter to bear.

She was hardly out of the room before she tore the envelope open, and tears of relief sprang to her eyes as she read the first lines of the letter.

MY DEAR CHILD,

I was deeply disappointed that you did not look me up on your way to the station as I begged you to do in my letter. I suppose you had it, by the way? Jackson assured me you put it in the hands of Sir Torrens for you. My father is still here, and even now I cannot leave him for a moment. His father is surprisingly grateful, and I am a little tired myself over having pulled him through. It was a hard case thing for three days. Now, my dear, let me know what your affairs, which interest me far more than my own. I have my business, too, now, since your father did me the honour to make me a trustee. Mr Sidney Wilbrahams

has been over to see me more than once. He assures me that the Chase will be put in the market by Sir Torrens almost immediately. Sir Torrens is in London, I believe, and he told my mother he intended leaving two days before the funeral. Pray write and tell me all that is happening to you. As soon as I can leave my Australian I shall come up to town and see you, and be introduced to Elizabeth Hatherleigh. It is very difficult to imagine her in a convent. When and what and where do you go? Tell me if you are comfortable and happy. Never mind the spelling. I should understand if you merely wrote the crosses.

Your devoted old friend,

Bob."

Reine jumped into the motor car beside Elizabeth's side with the first smiling face she had shown since her father's death. They were at the post office, in the noisy and bustling high road to Hammersmith, where Lady Elizabeth stopped to send off her telegram. The car remained at first in the car, staring out with interest on the suburban crowds.

Suddenly a thought occurred to her which made her spring to her feet, leap out of the car, and follow her guardian into the office.

"I'll send Bob a long telegram just to show I haven't forgotten him!" she said to her guardian.

Reine always sent telegrams instead of letters when it was possible, as she lacked the epistolary style.

She came up swiftly behind Lady Elizabeth in order to scribble her telegram in the vacant compartment near her, and being five inches taller than that lady, she was able, without wishing it, to read over her shoulder the address she had just finished writing.

With a shock of surprise she saw on the wall

"Sir Torrens Hatherleigh, Folkestone Street, Piccadilly."

CHAPTER X

COURTSHIP IN THE ROW

"OF coorse I'm not saying I want to leave you, Miss Reine. I've been in your father's service since I was a little teeny tot. And my heart is so kind that I couldn't desert you, and so I came with you to this place. And whether it's a prison or a nunnery or a loonatic asylum, I can't understand. I don't complain, though there ain't no fun or talking, or any of the attention from gentlemen I am used to, though I don't take no notice of it. As I say, I put up with things, 'aving a sweet disposition. I goo along in my own little way, with a bright smile and a kind word to everybody, though nobody here gives so much as a 'Good day' back, and though they're dressed mostly in curtains and blankets, with their heads tied up. But where I do draw the line is ghosts."

Esther Yeo paused dramatically in the act of fastening Reine's hunting stock as she uttered the last word, and peered up into the face of her young mistress to see what effect her discourse had produced upon her.

Reine was dressing for a ride, her two horses, Bessie and Thelma, having arrived from Merehampton. Miss Hatherleigh was not in the habit of attaching much importance to Esther's confidences, which consisted chiefly in the glorification of her own lofty character, beautiful disposition, and charms of person. As, together

flowers and apples and such like. But I am that refined I care only for the opinion of the quality."

On the subject of her beauty Torrens had gravely assured her that there could not be two opinions. He had then reminded her to deliver the note, and they had parted on excellent terms.

Esther had been sufficiently interested to open and study the folded leaf she had been asked to remit, and had discovered to her disgust that the message was written in French.

Translated, it ran thus :

"Cannot go on living unless I see you. Now that you have your horses meet me in Rotten Row any morning between ten and twelve. Your devoted cousin, Torrens."

Reine was sufficiently fascinated to feel pleasurable excitement at the idea of meeting him. She had a French governess and so was able to read his letter. No other man had made love to her. Her boyish frankness had repelled admirers, and her want of a chaperon had made her difficult to approach.

Robert Osborne loved her far too well to imperil her real friendliness by anything like courtship. Consequently, Torrens was the first to call her "sweetheart" and "darling," the first to catch her boldly in his arms and endeavour to kiss her lips, the first to ask her hand in marriage.

She did not love him yet; but his good looks, his dash and charm, attracted her after the moth and candle fashion, and she at once decided that she would meet him as he asked, and even hesitated over the choice of a hat, so anxious was she to look her best on the occasion.

Miss Yeo the while was continuing her confidences.

"One hat suits you just the same as another, Miss. Your face seems sort of the same like. Now, there's me: when I put on a sailor, I hardly dare look about, it makes me that young and saucy. Whereas my large one with the the shady brim—my Gainsbury, as they call 'em—well, that imperent boy, Barney Lucas, that has followed me all the way up from Devonshire—"

"What on earth do you mean, Esther? Barney Lucas had no idea that you and I were here when he came to ask Lady Elizabeth for a situation."

"So you think, Miss. You may be right, of coorse. I only know what he told me."

"But why should he follow you from Devonshire?"

"There you are, Miss! As I told him, he is a silly boy. But they're like that—going mad over women a few years older than themselves, who haven't as much as noticed they was there. Anyway, Barney seed me in my Gainsbury, and says he I was a picture, nothing less. He kept me talking until, as you remember, Miss, I was almost too late to dress you for dinner, asking questions and all that. And sure enough it was him that set me on about the ghost."

"Give me my gloves, Easher, it's time I was off. What do you mean about a ghost?"

Esther came nearer and spoke in a thrilling whisper.

"He'd heard something from that old uncle of his at the lodge. And says Barney, 'Esther, you are a clever woman. You watch for it, and let me know.' So what did I do last

flowers and apples and such like. But I am that refined I care only for the opinion of the quality."

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Esther came nearer and spoke in a thrilling whisper.

"He'd heard something from that old uncle of his at the lodge. And says Barney, 'Esther, you are a clever woman. You watch for it, and let me know.' So what did I do last

night but put the light out in my room at half past nine, like as they ask us to do here, and can see we do through the glass over the doors. Then I crept into bed with my clothes and a pair of soft slippers on, and at half-past ten out I went, with a bit of candle and a box of matches in my pocket and down the passages to what they call the East Corridor at the back, where the lumber and box-rooms are. There I hid behind the curtain and waited. And, sure enough, I saw it?"

"Saw what?"

"The Grey Sister, they call her. It's some story they tell of the old times when this house was a real nunnery and nobody couldn't never get out. Then some young lady tried to steal away, but they caught her and bricked her up in a wall where her skeleton is now. Since then her spirit walks. And I know it is true, for I saw her with my own eyes."

"Esther, I have often thought you were a little bit cracked, and now I am sure of it!"

"Just as you please, Miss! P'raps you'll come with me some night and see for yourself. There was a little gleam of light from the moon, and I could see something small and grey slithering along without any noise. Close to me seemed to stop, as if it knew I was there. It was bent like a cat, and then it straightened itself, and underneath the hood I seed the face quite plain. It gave me a fearful turn, for it was all on fire, the hair was flame, and the face was alight and gleaming wicked like, and there were bright sparks round the head—"

"Esther, you must be crazy or a tremendous liar! Why didn't you cry out and summon help? Why didn't you tell me before? If

all this really happened, you would have been frightened to death."

"Not me, Miss! I've led too good a life and my conscience is too clean. Says I to myself, 'Esther, you have never done harm to nobody; in consequence, nothing can do harm to you. You're that pure and good nothing can hurt you.' That sort of soothed me like, and when I'd finished thinking it, the figger was gone."

"Gone where?"

"That's the queerest part, Miss. For I kept my head, and stepped out boldly, and searched about just where it seemed to melt into the wall. Not finding anything, but wanting to make sure, I crept round to the East Corridor this morning to peer about by daylight. And right in the wall, papered over as if it was part of it, what did I find but a door. Then I questioned one of them sisters as mustn't talk, and she told me it was used no more, as it led to a flight of stairs that had fallen to bits. If you don't believe all I've told you, Miss, will you come with me now and I'll show you the door?"

"Oh, the door's there, I daresay, Esther, if you've seen it by daylight; but you must have dreamed about the lady whose head was on fire. It's half past-nine now and I'm off. Ta ta!"

She laughed to herself over Esther's weird imaginings as she sprang into her saddle and rode towards the park.

It was one of those mellow mornings of late autumn with which London is sometimes favoured after a wet and disappointing summer. The very leaves blown down on the pavements by the breeze seemed to fall caressingly, and the house sparrows chirped gaily in the sunshine.

In the relief of her favourite exercise after a fortnight of depressing monotony, Reine's spirits rose to their highest. She was only a child of less than nineteen years, ignorant of life's passions and tragedies, ignorant even of the fact that she was playing with fire on this morning expedition.

The boy of fifteen who rode behind her as groom knew far more of the world, and particularly of the bad side of it, than did she. Barney Lucas had been born in a strolling booth and reared on a race course. He was a thief by birth, a spy by choice, and life for him held few illusions.

The best way to live well, in his opinion, was to get what he termed "a 'old" on people. He considered that he had made a splendid beginning by getting "a 'old" on Sir Torrens Hatherleigh. But his present situation suggested to his active brain other possibilities of blackmail. From his uncle he gathered that some of the grey and white robed ladies incarcerated in St. Ursula's Retreat, and who never appeared outside its garden walls, had been wealthy and important persons in the fashionable world, and now willingly gave up their lives and their money to the direction of Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh.

Barney did not believe much in anything, except a few superstitions.

"If they 'and over their money to Lady Elizabeth, it's probably because she knows a bit too much about them, and they want to keep 'er mouth shut," he reflected. "Why shouldn't I ockipy my spare time in finding out somethink, and share her pickings?"

With this end in view, he started communication with the interior of the Retreat by

means of Esther Yeo, tales of whose conceit and vanity he had heard among the stable hands at the Chase.

Barney had his own his ideas about the ghostly Grey Sister, whose spirit had been seen to flit from out the solid masonry of the Retreat to a ruined chapel in the garden, in the wall of which her body was supposed to have been immured.

"Some of them reformed ones out on the spree," he decided. "If I catch 'em, I mean to make 'em pay up!"

Barney's great aim in life was to make money as fast as possible without too much work. But with all his cunning, his cynicism, and his laziness, he had a certain code of ethics. He loved horses, he hated brutality and cruelty, and he liked and respected "Miss Reine."

Had he been a stern moralist, instead of a dishonest stable boy, he could not have been more shocked than he was when he saw his young mistress stop her horse and shake hands with a handsome, fair-haired man, mounted on a showy chestnut mare, and let him ride by her side along the Row.

"S'elp me if she ain't sweet on the chap as murdered her father!"

Barney jumped to this conclusion on seeing the blood rush to Reine's cheeks at the meeting. That Torrens looked lover-like could not be denied. He rode alongside of the girl, bending towards her, and smiling into her eyes with a light in his own which enhanced their beauty.

"I ain't a saint, but I'd like to tell that fellow what I think of him!" quoth Barney to himself.

"I came because I had something to say to you, not because you asked me to," Reine was

saying, with a young girl's awkward coquetry. "First of all, why didn't you give me my friend—Dr. Osborne's—letter, which his servant put into your hands for me? Can you answer that?"

"Certainly! I kept it back because I loved you. In fact I put it in the fire."

She turned her head and stared at him in wonder, then looked away, unable to meet the laughing light in his eyes.

"You have the cheek to tell me that!" she exclaimed.

"All's fair in love and war. I wasn't going to give you another man's letters."

"Perhaps you opened it to see what was in it?"

Torrens reddened slightly at the well-merited accusation.

"No, dear! I shouldn't do that," he answered gently. "But I hate to have another man look at you, much less write to you."

She glanced at him again, this time sharply.

"Now, another question! What did you think of the telegram Lady Elizabeth sent to your place in Folkestone Street a week ago?"

His face changed. Amazement and annoyance flashed across it.

"So you saw it?" he said after a pause, in a low voice. "Extraordinary, wasn't it?"

He was watching her closely with ill-concealed anxiety.

"Especially as she had just told me she didn't know where you were," Reine replied.

"Lady Elizabeth hates me so bitterly that she would stop at nothing."

"Yes. But why telegraph such a message?" asked Reine, who was longing to know what the telegram contained.

"Very simple. To prevent me from seeing you."

"Oh! That was it, was it?"

A look of relief spread over his face.

"Didn't you guess it?" he asked.

"Perhaps I did. And that's why I came."

"Have you anything else to ask me, dearest?"

"Only to keep a proper distance and not call me silly and familiar names. Oh, and yes! There is one thing more I would like to know! Has lady Elizabeth some hold on you that you seem so horribly afraid of her, and that she is able to write you threatening telegrams?"

He was silent for so long that she began to think he had not heard her. Glancing towards him, she noted that the perfect aquiline profile looked set and drawn. For the moment the sunny character of Torrens' face had left it, and his expression was serious and sombre.

"Forgive me," he said at last, turning towards her with an affectionate smile, "but you are so jolly frank you rather take the wind out of a man. Mind, I like it. It isn't what one is used to in the women of our world; I wish it were. I will try to answer you truthfully. Years ago, when you were a little kiddy in the nursery, I was in India, and so were the Hatherleighs, Lady Elizabeth and her late husband. He was a surly fellow; hated me because I had been your grandmother's favourite nephew. I was flirting with a very charming woman; so was Hatherleigh. We had a fearful row, and he told no end of lies about me. So much so that I cut India and thought it better to leave the Army. I had hardly met Lady Elizabeth. She was always one of the ultra-goods, and he wouldn't let me

know her. But she was jealous of him, and through this row between us there was a lot of talk. They quarrelled, I fancy, and he went off in a huff on some dangerous expedition, and never was heard of again! Women can't reason, and she chooses to think it was my fault she lost him. So she hates me like poison, and goes out of her way to give me a bad name. She needn't trouble, for it's black enough without her! Now you have the story. I know she's a good woman, and I respect her; but I hate getting in her way. Superstition, I suppose, but I have a feeling she brings me ill-luck, and I've had enough of that. There! I've talked no end. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes. I apologise. Of course it's no affair of mine. I can't stand living with Lady Elizabeth. But I believe she means to be kind. As soon as I said I must ride, she sent for my horses, and even engaged an old stable-lad of my father's to look after them. He's riding behind me now."

"Ah! A smart-looking lad, he seems."

Sir Torrens reined in his horse and looked over his shoulder at Barney. As the lad met the direct gaze of the baronet's clear blue eyes, his own faltered and fell. A sudden fear came upon him, a dread lest, in endeavouring to prosecute his claim upon this well-dressed, easy-mannered man about town, he might not be tackling a task beyond his strength.

To Barney there seemed to be something of contempt in the kindly condescension of the gentleman's gaze. That gilded future, wherein he was to live in luxury upon money forced out of a frightened victim all at once receded into the realms of the unattainable. Barney almost

asked himself whether the terrible scene in Sir John's library were not an invention of his own imagination. Certainly no one looked less a conscience-stricken criminal, a forger and almost a murderer, than this well-groomed cavalier, who was engaged in making love to his dead cousin's daughter.

As if to prove his benevolent nature, Sir Torrens addressed the boy.

"So you were with my cousin at the Chase?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't seem to remember your face when I visited the stables."

"I left, sir, the day you arrived."

"How do you like London after Dartmoor?"

"I knew London first, sir."

"Ah! Be sure you look well after this young lady in the traffic. These motors are very dangerous."

"Yes, sir. I will do my best to look after Miss Reine."

Barney's shifty eyes fell beneath Sir Torrens' direct gaze. Yet his tone, almost against his will, held a suspicion of menace.

"Good boy! Here's something to drink my health with!"

Barney touched his hat and pocketed the half-crown.

"Not the last by many a one I mean to have out of you!" was his mental comment.

"I shouldn't trust that lad too much," observed Torrens to Reine as they cantered away together beyond Barney's hearing. "He has shifty eyes."

"I don't think Barney had a chance as a child," she said. "Sort of brought up on a race-course. But he's always civil and nice to me, and seems grateful."

"How can anything male help being nice, as you call it, to you, my child? You have all the frankness of a boy, all the sweetness of a girl. You have saved my life with your strong arms, and stolen my heart with your blue eyes—"

"Stuff! Lady Elizabeth says you make love to everybody, and that it's an insult."

He was silent for some seconds, and then spoke in a constrained way.

"Do you mind if we don't talk about her?" he asked. "She brings me ill luck, as I told you—"

"I don't want to talk about her or anything any more! It time for me to ride home, and pretty sharply too, not to be late for one of the dismal feeds—"

"But we can't part like this, dear! When shall I see you again?"

"I am not going to make appointments."

"If I don't meet you in the Row I shall have to burgle the Retreat, or to make my way in disguised as a country sweetheart of that shrivelled up little maid of yours."

"Esther? She's such an old silly. She actually believes that boy Barney is in love with her."

"He told her so, I suppose?"

"Yes. For a game, of course."

"Rather a deep game, I should fancy! If I were you, with that boy making up to your maid, I should lock my jewellery up."

"I haven't any. Good-bye."

"Sure you have nothing else to ask me?"

"N-no. Yes, I have! Torrens, it isn't true that you think of selling the Chase, is it?"

"My dear, I can't keep it up."

"Then it is true! I must talk to you about it!"

"Reine, you know what I told you. On one condition I will keep the place."

"But that is nonsense—"

"I never was more in earnest. What is that boy of yours hanging about listening for? Reine, we can't discuss it here. You know my address in Folkestone Street. Write to me, come and see me—"

"Quite impossible!"

"Very well! Then don't blame me if I put the Chase in the market. You are the only person who can prevent me. You know your power. And you know my love," he added deliberately in a very low voice. "Good-bye, my darling!"

She tried to be angry with him as she rode away homewards. But the blood rose to her cheeks and her heart beat very fast indeed whenever she recalled the tone and the words:

"You know my love. Good-bye, my darling!"

CHAPTER XI

WATCHED

"BEG pardon, my lady, but you told me to look well after Miss Reine."

"Certainly."

"And to report to you anything that happened during her rides."

"Yes."

"This morning in Rotten Row a gentleman was waiting for her. Seemed to be there by appointment. He rode with Miss Reine, and told me to look after her, and gave me half-a-crown."

"A gentleman? Did you know him?"

"Yes, my lady. It was Sir Torrens Hatherleigh."

The "Lady Mother" took the news in dead silence.

Glancing at her nervously, for he was growing daily more in awe of her, Barney saw that her eyes were closed, and that her face was set and rigid as that of a dead woman.

When she spoke again her voice sounded faint and weak.

"You are a good boy. You have done your duty in telling me this. It is terrible to think of friendship between this innocent child and such a man. Perhaps the meeting was an accident: did you overhear any of their talk?"

"Yes, my lady. All I could. Sir Torrens he kept looking round, like as if he didn't want

me to hear. First of all they talked about you—"

"About me?"

"Yes, my lady. You and India, as far as I could catch."

"India!"

"Yes; and then they talked about the Chase, and his selling it, and she says he mustn't, and he says she knew the way to prevent him."

"Go on! Did you hear anything else?"

"He says a name that sounded like Folkestone Street, and she says: 'Impossible!' And he says: 'Good-bye, my darling!'"

Lady Elizabeth sprang up in her chair, clutching the arms with her thin fingers.

"On your honour, Barney, are you speaking the truth?"

"S'elp me if I haven't told the whole truth and nothing but the truth! I may be now and again forgetful about other people's property; but it downright made me sick to see him making love to my young lady after what I'd seen him do to her father!"

Lady Elizabeth bent her head and moved her lips. But no sound came from them. She dismissed him with a gesture of her hand, and as he stole out of the room he looked back and saw her seated in her high-backed oak chair, with white face lowered over her hands, which were clasped, he thought, in prayer.

Later in the day Reine, who was in a restless, excited mood and unable to settle to anything, made her way into the library to write a letter.

It was a task she detested; but she felt an overwhelming need for the advice of a friend.

Some sentinel at her girl's heart was giving the alarm. Try as she might, she could not

drive the thought of Torrens Hatherleigh out of her mind. Her good sense and quick intuition warned her not to trust him; but she was beginning to learn that it is possible to love without trust.

In the comfortable, untidy household at the Chase she had never felt lonely, even during her father's frequent visits to London. Dogs, horses, a billiard-table, a tennis court, and her own corner of garden were there to engage her attention: the old servants loved her, and Mrs. Welfare was always to be counted on for a cup of tea and a chat in the housekeeper's room, even if the "doc" did not ride over.

But here, in this austere Retreat, Reine had no occupation. Chapel and needlework, digging in the vegetable garden and the exhortations of Father Paul were all equally distasteful to her, and the shadowy grey figure of the silent women oppressed her senses and "got upon her nerves."

They did not like her: that was evident. She, with her strong young frame and exuberant vitality, struck too violent a note in this house of the penitent and the effaced. For effaced they all were, from plain Miss Pettigrew, wearied by mercenary suitors, and little Miss Dawson, with her sunken eyes that had seen too much of the bad side of life, to red-headed, vindictive Agatha, and bilious Emily, and gaunt Teresa the portress.

Each one of these women of different ages and conditions was devoted to Lady Elizabeth and seemed only to live for and through her. To Reine her influence was inexplicable at first; but gradually she grew to recognise the touch of the "iron hand in the velvet glove" which ruled the house.

One secret of her extraordinary influence over others lay in the fact that the Lady Mother never became intimate with anyone. She set the rule of confession and confessed frequently to Father Paul. What she told him no one knew or guessed; but the chaplain, whose sympathies drew him daily nearer to Rome, held her in almost superstitious reverence.

In spite of her frail appearance, Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh was never ill, and was capable of an astonishing amount of work. She rose at dawn, and never failed to attend early chapel: she directed everything, wrote or dictated hundreds of letters, managed all her own business, and constantly motored to and from Brighton and Canterbury to give St. Winifred's and St. Ethelberta's the benefit of her motherly care.

Under all the studied calm of her manner, a restless energy devoured her. There were many other institutions for the benefit of women and girls besides the Retreats with the management of which she was concerned; but she neglected nothing, and when not out in the world collecting subscriptions and interesting wealthy people in her charities, she was busily engaged with details of their effective and economical management.

To those who sought her counsel she preached holiness first, occupation second. No one at the Retreats, the Rest Houses, the Girls' Palaces, or any of her pet charities was allowed to be idle. If they were not praying or confessing, they must be scrubbing, digging, or sewing. One of her rules was that each inmate must make her own clothes, and even the children among her protégés had to play so

hard under their teachers' directions that they had no time to quarrel.

"She hypnotises everybody," Reine reflected, "and then sets them to work so that they have no time to wonder why they all obey her so slavishly."

The girl had disliked Major Hatherleigh's widow instinctively from the first; but she was compelled to admit that she worked incessantly, and must do a great deal of good. As to finding in her a friend to whom she could confide her troubles, that was out of the question. Yet advice Reine felt she must have, and so she nerved herself to the uncongenial task of letter-writing.

"My dear Bob," she began as she sat before one of the desks in the bare ante-room, warmed by an oil stove, and surrounded by glass-covered book-shelves filled with dreary-looking works on theology.

"My dear Bob!"

There she stopped, bit her pen, and fidgetted.

"How could she go on: "I am afraid I am falling in love with rather a bad sort of man, and I want your advice as to how I am to keep clear of it."

That was what she really wanted to say; but for once in her life she felt she must use dissimulation.

"I am awfully miserable here," she wrote at last. "The stables are a long way off, as this house has not got any, only garrages. So I cannot go and have a look at Bessie and Thelma, that came yesterday, to cheer me. I went to the Row this morning. Poor sport, riding up and down in the mud there. Barney Lucas came as groom. You remember the little dishonest chap at the Chase? His uncle

is chauffeur here. I cannot remember if chauffeur has two fs or one. I met Sir Torrens in the Row—"

She threw down her pen and reflected for several minutes.

No! She could not find in her to tell Bob that Sir Torrens was making love to her!

She took up her pen again and changed the subject.

"You say you are coming up to London to see me. Why do you not do it? I never got your letter, and thought it mean of you not to come to the funeral. Bob, I must go back home! This place is a sort of religious work-house. I must not whistle, I must not smoke cigarettes, I must not laugh or even talk, except in my room to that silly old goose Esther. I am leaving off eating, and you know that is not like me. Lady Elizabeth is a sort of Jabberwock, is it not called? The thing in India in a car that crushes people. Everybody here she crushes flat, and she wants to do the same by me. Bob, it is not good enough, and I must get home to the Chase and Dartmoor and free air, even if it takes all my money. They all hate me here and watch me—"

A faint movement behind her made her turn her head suddenly to meet the small dark eyes of Sister Agatha fixed upon the letter she was writing.

Agatha was a freckled, thin-featured woman, with narrow lips so closely shut that they showed as a faint pink line, and a pointed face which met Reine's angry look with irritating calmness.

"You were spying on me!" cried the girl.

"I was reading your letter, if that is what you mean. It is one of my duties to look after you and keep you out of mischief."

"I'm bothered if I will stand your cheek or your inquisitiveness!" exclaimed Miss Hatherleigh.

"I should complain, if I were you," sneered the grey-robed Sister. "The Lady Mother is in her room next door."

In a moment Reine was across the room and tapping on the door of Lady Elizabeth's sanctum.

"Sorry to disturb you!" she burst out on entering. "But I can't stand my letters being read while I write them! Sister Agatha has the face to tell me it is her duty to spy on me!"

Lady Elizabeth paused in dictating a business letter to Sister Emily.

"I am sorry that you should make a disturbance, Reine," she said with icy calm. "Sister Agatha was perfectly right, and is only carrying out my instructions. After your senseless conduct this morning, it is necessary in your own interests that your movements should be watched and guarded by those older and wiser than yourself."

CHAPTER XII

FIGHTING A GHOST

LOCKED in her room, every movement watched, forbidden to ride, and in evident disgrace before dozens of pairs of unfriendly or indifferent feminine eyes!

Elizabeth Hatherleigh, in spite of all her experience in the management of her own sex, was going the wrong way to work when she imposed such discipline upon the high-spirited daughter of her husband's cousin.

She had not wished for the guardianship, and the legacy which accompanied it, five hundred pounds, was not a sufficient reward for the trouble she was having and would have with such a "spoilt tomboy," as she mentally dubbed Reine.

The girl could be easily led by the affections, and her reasoning powers were good; but to be peremptorily ordered not to do anything without adequate explanation was hateful to her.

"No! I am not going to swear to you not to meet Torrens Hatherleigh when I am out riding; why should I?" she asked bluntly.

"Your father placed you in my care while you are under age. It must be sufficient that I tell you Torrens Hatherleigh is not a man whom a virtuous lady can know. He is notorious in London for the company he keeps. His male associates are gamblers, his female friends even worse. I cannot even talk of him to you.

You must obey me without more question. In your father's name I insist upon your promise never to speak to him again!"

"If I refuse?"

"Then you will not ride again while you are under my roof. And everywhere, in the house or taking exercise in the garden, your movements will be watched."

"How long do you think I shall put up with that?"

Lady Elizabeth looked steadily into the beautiful, mutinous face.

Then she shrugged her shoulders wearily.

"I do not know, Reine," she answered coldly. "Nor do I very much care. One thing only I and all my friends here can do: we can pray for you."

"That's the last straw!" Reine confided to her maid Esther. "There's nothing more insulting than praying for people against their will, except dreaming silly things about them and telling them at breakfast."

"Prayers don't do nobody any harm," the maid returned with a marked lack of sympathy. "And I'm to be punished for your goings on the day before yesterday, Miss, it seems. For I was watched this afternoon, I could swear, by that blackbearded chauffeur fellow, and he saw me stopped by a man in Chiswick Mall, who gave me a letter for you, and says he was Sir Torrens Hatherleigh's servant. Sure enough, soon as I coom back, Sister Agatha asks me a 'undred questions, and tells me I don't goo out alone any more. It's hard to be kept a prisoner along of someone else's sins, I must say!"

"Sins! Don't be silly and impertinent, Esther! And give me the letter!"

Reine's eyes shone brightly, and her heart

beat fast as she saw the handwriting. Faster yet when she read the words :—

"Darling, what does it mean?" the note began. "Two mornings gone, and no sign of you in the Row. I am sure you would not fail me of your own free will: I suppose it means that pale-faced lad has turned informer? I feel very uneasy about you. My man, to whom I am giving this note, will hang about the Barge Aground Inn in Old Chiswick from three to six to-day. Try to send me a few lines by him. Don't listen to and don't believe anything you may hear against me. I don't pretend to be very good: I have not had much of a chance. You know what hands are in riding, with you to guide me, I might run straighter. Try! We must meet soon, or you will lose the Chase and I shall lose you. Your devoted Torrens."

Reine read the letter, and blushed and softly laughed, as even a strongminded girl does as a rule over her first love-letters. Then she kept quite still a moment, listening.

"Esther," she said at last in a raised voice, "get a hat-pin, and stick it through the key-hole. If there's an eye or an ear the other side, that's not your fault."

The sound of footsteps stealthily retreating from the other side of the door followed this speech. Reine laughed as she heard them. Then she frowned and flushed angrily.

"I'm sick of all this!" she said in a low voice to Esther, "and I mean to cut it."

"Where will you goo, Miss?"

"Haven't quite made up my mind."

"But the place is allus locked up. How will 'ee goo?"

"They turn the keys on us at night ever since your ghost hunt," Reine explained in a whisper. "But I've been loosening an iron window bar in my room, and filling it up with crumb of bread for the last two days. I read

of that trick in a Boys' Magazine. To-night I mean to pull it out, and jump down to the garden, and scale the wall and make a bolt of it. Are you coming with me?"

"Don't 'ee do it!" Esther said unexpectedly. "There be something fey about her ladyship. She'd find it out and stop 'ee, for sure. No! If this gentleman, Sir Torrens, wants to marry you, why don't he come open to the house, and ask her ladyship's permission to coort 'ee like a man? When I've seen a bit of London, and it isn't much one sees shut up here, I'll come and stay with you when you're Lady Hatherleigh, leastways I will if I'm not married myself afore then. But there's more'n one farmer after me, and a doctor, a real gentleman, to say nothing of silly creatures like Barney Lucas, what is eat up by a fatal love of me and—"

"Oh, Esther, don't be a great silly, with your tales of a fatal love! If they were all after you and you want to marry, why are you still a spinster? Do talk sense! Are you coming with me to-night, or would you rather stop here?"

Esther's shrivelled face assumed an obstinate look.

"I'm not going I don't know where," she muttered.

"I shan't ask you again."

"Please yourself, Miss!"

"At least I must beg you not to give me away to that little sneak Barney. I don't believe he's up to any good, Esther, pretending to be in love with you in order to find out about what is going on in this house."

"It isn't all of us as is took in by pretended lovmaking, Miss. If I liked to be unkind, if I hadn't the best and softest heart in the world,

I might tell you of how a gentleman that seems to be after you is out night after night at card parties and suppers with quite another lady, as there be some as says he is married to. I might tell you that carroty hair is full as good to him as black, and I ought to know, as I had it from is own servant. But no! I'm that kind and pitiful I wouldn't hurt anyone's feelings. And all the rough things you say to me is but natural, as young mistresses can't abear to have their maids admired—"

"Oh, shut up, for goodness' sake, Esther! And clear out of my room, please! I have a few things I want to put together myself, and I must do it in peace."

From half-past nine that night Reine worked busily for over an hour at the bars of her window by the light of her small electric lamp.

She was not sorry to be relieved of Esther's companionship on her enterprise. She recognised that it was an adventurous thing to attempt alone; but she was no more easily frightened than is a dare-devil leader of boys in a big school.

Nevertheless, a shiver of something like nervous apprehension ran through her as she found herself in the garden in the chilly October moonlight. The rustling of the evergreens sounded ghostly, and the wind which fluttered the leaves of a tall poplar tree near the house seemed to set them whispering of her escape.

It was not far from the "witching hour," when "churchyards yawn and graves give up their dead."

Reine was not superstitious; but as she made her way between the beds of strawberries and asparagus towards the outer wall, she began to

wish that she had not heard so much about the spectral "Grey Sister."

"Buck up, my girl!" she murmured half aloud to encourage herself. "If Esther can imagine that every man who sees her is in love with her, she's quite equal to supposing she met a ghost with its face on fire. I've always known she was not all there, and never believed half she told me. Very likely there's not a word of truth in that tale about Torrens going out supping and card-playing with some red-haired terror. He told me not to believe anything I heard about him. Not that I care!"

"Still, as it comes from Esther, it's got to be taken with a lot of salt, and—What's that?"

She had arrived at the crumbling mass of masonry, half-veiled by ivy, which had formed the chapel of the ancient nunnery. Part of it was ruinous, and part was turned into outhouses and gardeners' sheds, which stretched as far as the high red brick garden wall. Broken glass in plenty surmounted this last. Reine was staring up at the corrugated iron roof, when an odd purring noise from the road outside caught her hearing.

She knew the sound, but for a few seconds she could not class it. It seemed to be coming down the lane, which was a lonely one at night, and finally to pause at a point in the garden wall which was very near the spot where she stood.

The meaning of it flashed upon her at last.

"A motor! That's what it is!" she told herself. "A motor just outside our saintly convent wall! Has somebody else besides myself had enough of it, and is she going to elope? This is great sport! But I don't want them to catch me!"

She had only time to spring on to the roof

of the shed and crouch in the shadow of the wall before she heard a key being turned in the lock of a door not far beneath where she lay hidden.

Reine quivered with interest and excitement. No supernatural fears oppressed her; for, as she swiftly realized, ghosts do not need to employ motor cars and door-keys.

Yet the object which presently stole noiselessly from the outbuildings a couple of yards away looked spectral enough.

A nun, robed and hooded in grey garments which had an odd luminous effect in the gloom, was creeping towards the house. Reine had not calculated the noise which is produced by an athletic young woman jumping upon a roof of corrugated iron. The ghost or spirit, whatever it was, seemed to hesitate, and turned a heavily-veiled head in her direction more than once, as though anxious to know the cause of the sound.

Whether it perceived Reine the girl could not guess. Certainly, its silent course quickened as it fled, almost as if it feared pursuit, towards St. Ursula's.

At the sight Miss Hatherleigh's sporting instincts were too much for her. Her lips formed a "View Halloo!" as she leaped down from her hiding place, and tore across the garden in full cry after the "Grey Sister."

It was evident the phantom did not mean to be caught. It tried to gain the house, but finding its retreat cut off, doubled and darted away down the garden, followed closely by Reine, who was a champion runner and thoroughly enjoying herself.

She saw that the figure in grey was endeavouring to regain the door in the outbuildings through which it had entered the garden.

Reine held back a little, as though fatigued by the chase, and then sprang upon her quarry, literally lifting it off its feet in her strong arms.

It was something feminine, very thin, very little, and very young she surmised by its wonderful activity and fierce struggles.

"Now, don't kick and bite like that, you nasty little thing!" Reine cried in remonstrance. "I mean to see which of the goody-goodies you are, stealing out like this and frightening people. Quiet now! It's no good struggling with me: I could make two of you! Come, if you behave properly I won't give you away. But I will see if it is that cat Agatha, or—"

She caught both the small hands in one of hers, and with her disengaged hand suddenly twisted round her victim's head and tore off the grey veil.

The face exposed to view in the moonlight was so unearthly in appearance that she almost loosed her hold.

Hair that shone like a ruddy gold aureole, touched here and there with electric sparks, framed an elfish face over which a bluish light played. The lips were distended, exposing the teeth clenched in a grimace of hate: the whole writhing figure was alive with malice and fury, and showed in the moonlit convent garden like some caricature of a nun carved on a church choir seat in the Middle Ages by irreverent craftsmen.

"You are ugly enough, whoever you are!" Reine remarked with her usual candour. "What are you playing at? What—"

A sharp cry stopped her words and made her relinquish her grasp. The captured creature had bent and sharply bitten her hand. Freed for a second, it darted away, and disappeared,

as Reine guessed, into the outbuildings of the chapel.

"Tiger cat!" murmured Miss Hatherleigh. "You needn't think I want any more to do with you! Whether you are a bogey or a Sister of Peace, you can have St. Ursulu's and its inmates all to yourself and your teeth and claws! I am out of the place at once and for ever!"

She was on the roof of the outbuilding again, battering down the glass which crowned the wall with her own window bar which she had left there at sight of the "Grey Sister." As midnight struck she climbed to the top of the wall, and dropped down on the other side to the open road and freedom.

CHAPTER XIII

BARNEY ON THE TRACK

"It isn't half good enough!" said Barney Lucas.

It was the day after Reine Hatherleigh's flight.

Sister Agatha had been the first to discover it, and she had dragged Esther Yeo into the presence of the Lady Mother that she might disclose all she knew of her mistress's escape.

"She wouldn't tell me nothing, and I can't tell you nothing," the handmaid protested. "What I said myself was: 'Don't 'ee goo, Miss!' But it was preaching to deaf ears. So I hides my head under the bed-clothes, so as I should have my conscience clear. For I am that truthful and conscientious—"

"That will do. You can leave the room!" said the Lady Mother.

Lady Elizabeth had received the news of her ward's escape at first with incredulity and then with deep concern. The method of it was easily explained by the missing window bar and the injury to the wall above the iron roof of the outhouse. Lady Elizabeth went into the garden with Teresa the portress and Agatha, and with Miss Dawson, who was about to enter her novitiate, and who was aghast when she learned what had happened.

"Here—where one is so safe and happy! It is so mad, so wicked to want to rush back

into a world of sorrow and temptation!" she murmured with pale lips. "I can't think what Miss Hatherleigh can be made of!"

Lady Elizabeth looked at her hard, almost, it would seem, with suspicion in her eyes.

"Flesh and blood, that is what poor Reine is made of," she said quietly. "When evil comes into the lives of such women, it is in the form of a man!"

"Ah, men!" faltered Miss Dawson with a little shiver. "I should have thought she was too boyish, too like a romping child, to be interested in them."

"We cannot judge by outward show," said Lady Elizabeth. "I pity the poor girl with all my heart. I must do my utmost, even now, to save her from herself, and from the terrible dangers into which she may be running."

Her delicate face looked strained and anxious. She felt Reine's desertion very keenly, and from the point of view of her companions she lavished upon her unruly ward an amount of thought of which the girl was unworthy.

Miss Yeo meanwhile had slipped off to carry the news to her youthful admirer Barney Lucas, upon whom it produced a remarkable effect.

To begin with, he bullied his supposed lady-love.

"Why didn't you stop her, you woolly-head?" he inquired of the indignant spinster.

"Goo away with your impertinent tongue! How dare you address a genteel person like me with such familiarity? That's what cooms of being too affable and condescending with one's inferiors, stable-boys and such-like."

"You won't call me an inferior when I

splashes yer in the mud from my motor, or 'alf runs yer over as I sit along of my groom in my dog-cart. And that day will come, old girl, as sure as my name is Barnabas Lucas!"

"And who's going to pay for them luxuries? Or do you mean to steal 'em?"

"You've got a nasty tongue, Esther, when your fur is rubbed the wrong way. But quiet down, there's a good soul, and tell me where Miss Reine has gone, and why you didn't go with her?"

"Maybe she's gooin' to a husband, and doesn't want a lady's-maid, but a parson—"

"A husband? Great Scott! You don't think she means to marry that Hatherleigh chap?"

"Why shouldn't she? And what business is it of yours?"

"Then you do think so, Esther? Come now! Be as sensible as you are pretty. You may call me only a boy, but I'm sixteen, and have seen a good bit of the world, and as I was saying to my Uncle Tim yesterday, I never set eyes on a woman of two or three and thirty as fresh as you. The little Dartmoor Daisy—that's what we called you in the Chase stables, and hang me if it isn't a perfect name for you, not to speak of being poetic. You're sharp, too; not much escapes you. What put it into your head that Sir Torrens was making up to our young lady serious?"

"She's rich and he ain't. Twice I've brought her letters from him, written in a furrin tongue. And she's grinned and got red over reading 'em, like as girls do. Haven't you heard how she saved his life the day of the Squire's funeral, tugging of him out of Barrow Pool? Sir Torrens he told everybody at the Chase about

it. And, sure enough, she tore the sleeves out of her coat in pulling at him. Miss Reine didn't say nothing about it. She's a good sportswoman, I will say that for her; though, like most all ladies, she can't see no beauty in the women as waits on her—"

"But what makes you think she has gone to him now?"

"Where else should she goo?" Esther inquired composedly.

Her calm acquiescence in her mistress's flight and matrimonial schemes was altogether unlike Barney's feelings on the subject. He liked and respected Reine as much as he could like and respect anyone. She was his boyish ideal of what a woman ought to be, and he was resolved that when in future years of plenty he looked for a suitable partner, she would have to be on the lines of Miss Hatherleigh.

His juvenile sense of importance was flattered by the notion that he was her guardian angel and champion.

"I've only to give her the tip, and she'll hate the man as she ought to," he reflected. "Her father would be alive now, and she enjoying of herself in her own home, but for him. A forger, more'n half a murderer—she shan't have him if I can prevent it, and knowing what I know, I ought to be able to put a spoke in his wheel!"

Barney's brain was so full of schemes that he had almost forgotten that he was in Lady Elizabeth's employment. He slept and had his meals at the lodge, going over to the stables hired for the accommodation of Miss Hatherleigh's horses to see after their needs, and it was as he was coming out of the stable-yard with the key in his pocket, bound for the

railway station, that he ran into Harry Hunt, the chauffeur, a man whom he cordially disliked.

"Where are you off to, Lucas?"

Barney's fingers were going instinctively to his cap when he arrested their progress.

"I've got to make a call in Long Acre about Miss Hatherleigh's saddle," he explained.

"You can't go now. I want you in the lodge."

"You ain't my master, you know," observed Barney.

"You will have to take orders from me, all the same!"

"No offence, Mr. Hunt, but I have my work to do first."

"I shall report you to her ladyship!"

"P'raps I may find another situation while I am away—who knows?" suggested Barney pertly.

Then he ran on a little way to leave a safe distance between him and the angry chauffeur.

"In my next shop," he called out as a parting shot, "I bar having a broken-down gent dressed up as a servant to boss me. So long!"

The man called Harry Hunt looked after the lad vindictively.

"Having that boy here was a mistake from the beginning," he muttered. "I always told Betty so. I can't make out why she ever engaged him. But if one wants to find that Hatherleigh girl I suppose he had better be followed."

Hurrying back to the garage, he sprang into the motor, and drove to the station in time to leave the vehicle in charge of a porter, and jump into the train which was bearing Barney Lucas on his way to Folkestone Street.

Barney changed into the Tube, followed by

Hunt, whom he saw, and upon whom he bestowed a cheeky nod of recognition.

"He can just go back and tell the old lady I've gone to see Sir Torrens," he reflected. "I mean to stop Miss Reine from marrying the fellow, and anyhow, now she's gone and there's no one to ride out with, I'm not going to be tied down to that asylum for old cats at Chiswick any longer. Lady Elizabeth thinks she's keeping my mouth shut, and giving me a fortune with twenty pounds a year and my board. But it's not quite good enough for Barney Lucas!"

In spite of his self-confidence, a sudden qualm of fear passed over him as he halted before the house in Folkestone Street in which, as he had learned from a directory, Torrens was lodging.

The ground floor and first floor of the building were occupied by the show-rooms of Madame Véronique, a fashionable dressmaker, and the two higher storeys had been turned into small but cosy flats for single gentlemen, whose names: "Stephen Worthington, solicitor," and "Sir Torrens Hatherleigh," were inscribed beneath the bells immediately inside the private entrance.

At the moment when Barney's finger was about to press the bell his sense of apprehension redoubled. The feeling that someone was close beside him, begging him for his own good to go no farther in the matter, held him so strongly that he turned a scared face to see whether handsome, rough-handed "Newmarket Nan," his mother, were really on his track, and urging him to leave the house without meeting Sir Torrens.

"Go back! Go back!"

Surely it was her voice that rang in his ears!

But as his fingers fell away from the bell, he perceived the saturnine face of Harry Hunt the chauffeur as he stood watching him a few paces down the street.

The sight decided Barney. He rang the electric bell.

"It would never do for that chap to think I was afraid to go up now I've got here," he told himself. "Besides, I ain't! What is there to be afraid of? It's him, Sir Torrens, as has got to learn to be afraid of me!"

He ran up the stairs, trying to whistle a tune, and found the door of the top flat a little way open.

"I want to see Sir Torrens Hatherleigh," he said loudly to a supercilious-looking manservant.

"My master is engaged. What is your business, my lad?"

"Very important business, my man! Tell your master Mr. Barnabas Lucas wants to see him at once, and that he comes from Chiswick."

"Stable news, I suppose? Sporting tips, eh?"

"That isn't your affair! Just you take my message!"

"Cub!" muttered the man as he sauntered away.

But he returned almost immediately.

"Sir Torrens is at breakfast. You are to come in," he said, and forthwith showed Barney into the presence of his master.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TIGER'S DEN

THE morning was a grey October one, with a damp thickness in the air which seemed the advance herald of a November fog.

Torrens Hatherleigh's little dining-room was bright and warm with crimson-shaded incandescent lights and a gas fire burning on the hearth. Tapestry covered the walls, the furniture was of finely carved oak, a few beautiful bronze figures of dancing girls and of race-horses decorated the mantelpiece and sideboard, and the table would have tempted Lucullus with its show of silver, crystal, delicate china, chrysanthemums to enliven the flavour of coffee, buttered toast, fish-balls, kidneys and bacon, and preserves.

Torrens himself completed the picture of wealthy comfort. He did not belong to the class of "old bachelors" who neglect themselves. From the crown of his head, on which the fair hair was parted with exquisite neatness, to the soles of his feet in grey silk socks and patent leather shoes, everything about him was as well kept and decorated as are the appointments of a first-class race-horse.

Barney Lane might boast to himself that he "'eld 'im ^{own} 'ollow of his 'and," but the fact remained that in Sir Torrens' presence the ex-stable boy felt common and insignificant.

Meantime he was asking himself: "Where was Miss Reine?"

There was no sign of a woman's presence, nor of flurry or excitement in the baronet's manner. He welcomed Barney with a friendly nod while helping himself to his breakfast, and laid down the morning paper he was reading.

"You are my cousin's groom from Chiswick, are you not?" he inquired. "You have brought me news of her, I suppose?"

What did he know of her flight, Barney wondered as he watched Sir Torrens' untroubled face and pleasantly smiling blue eyes.

"No, sir," he answered after a pause, "I haven't come with news from Miss Hatherleigh, but to ask whether you had heard anything about her?"

"Anything about her? What should I hear?"

"Last night Miss Hatherleigh ran away from the Retreat."

Sir Torrens put down his cup. Either he was an admirable actor or he was genuinely surprised.

"Ran away!" he repeated. "Where to?"

"No one knows so far, sir. Lady Elizabeth is in a sad way. Her chauffeur Hunt is just outside this house. He followed me up to town, I suppose to see if you knew anything about it."

"I? No: how should I? Where is this chauffeur fellow?"

"If you look out of the window, sir, you will see him."

Torrens rose and crossed to the window, which was of a small, old-fashioned shape, opening in the middle, the house at Folkestone Street being an old one adapted to modern requirements.

A red silk curtain was drawn to shut out the

meagre day-light. Torrens pulled it back a little, and glanced down into the street without showing himself. His mouth widened into a curious smile as he perceived the tall, thin form and dark, forbidding face of Lady Elizabeth's chauffeur.

"So you came up together, you and—what did you say the man's name was?"

"Hunt, sir."

"Ah, yes! You and Hunt?"

"Not exactly together. Mr. Hunt had been giving me orders, and I didn't relish them from him. So we had a few words, and when I came up to town he followed me."

"How did you know my address?"

"I found it out in a directory."

"So you found out my address in a directory?" Torrens said as he helped himself plentifully to the dish before him. "You have really a remarkably inquiring turn of mind, my boy!"

"In Miss Reine's interests, sir, I would do more than that."

"Oh, so it is in Miss Reine's interests that you have come to see me? What put it into your head that I should help you to find her?"

"I didn't know but what she might have come to you, sir. Seeing as you seemed sweet on her—"

For a moment a very angry look darkened Sir Torrens' face. Then he burst out laughing.

"You are an odd boy!" he exclaimed. "In your state of life, when any attention is shown to a young woman by a man, he is supposed to be what you call 'sweet on' her, eh? Miss Hatherleigh is the daughter of my cousin, Sir John Hatherleigh—"

"Yes, sir. I was in his stables."

"Ah, were you? I don't seem to remember your face."

"No, sir. You wouldn't. But we was both together in the room when he died."

Barney's heart gave a leap of apprehension.

Sir Torrens stared at him as though he attached no meaning to the words, and went on composedly eating his breakfast.

"How did Miss Hatherleigh get away?" he inquired after a pause.

"Pulled an iron window-bar out of her room, and jumped to the garden, and then 'ooked it over the wall, breaking the glass off the top with the bar," Barney recounted with admiration. "She's a good plucked one, is Miss Reine!"

"When was she missed?"

"Not till this morning at seven o'clock. That soft-headed old maid of hers said she heard her drop out a little before midnight."

"She didn't take the woman with her, then?"

"No, sir. Esther says she don't even know where she's gone."

Torrens remained silent for a few minutes.

He was revolving in his mind what could have become of Reine. The girl attracted him more than any woman had done for years. He had not the least doubt that she would become deeply attached to him sooner or later; but her brusque coyness fascinated him by its novelty far more than a coming-on disposition would have done.

Probably she meant to summon him to her side; he doubted whether she would come to his flat. She would run away to a hotel or to friends; but then, again, she was almost a stranger in London, and had, as far as he knew, no friends there.

He was not so much anxious on her behalf as anxious not to lose sight of her and her five thousand a year. He was, as usual, in debt and in want of money. He had been in debt and in want of money since his early school-days; but just now he was more in debt than usual, and there was that white elephant the Chase on his hands, with no money to keep it up.

He was heartily tired of England and of certain complications which beset him there. Torrens tired repeatedly of things and places and people. His manners with his intimates were affectionate, and he was glad to come back to them after spells of absence; but every now and then he longed, as he would have expressed it, to "chuck the whole thing," and "put the sea" between him and the old country.

"I am as much in the dark as everyone else about Miss Hatherleigh's movements," he said presently. "Probably she is with friends and will write to me. Then, if she wishes it, I will let Lady Elizabeth know her address. Will that satisfy you? You are a good boy to have come up: it was quite the right thing to do, as I am Miss Hatherleigh's relative. Now you can go home again, and take the chauffeur fellow with you. I don't care about having this place watched by men in the street. Here's something for your trouble."

He tossed the lad a sovereign, and began to open his paper, as though to dismiss him.

Barney pocketed the coin, but stood his ground.

"I beg pardon, sir, but I am not going back to Chiswick."

"Taking a holiday, eh?" Sir Torrens asked indifferently, with his eyes fixed on the columns

"Ah, were you? I don't seem to remember your face."

"No, sir. You wouldn't. But we was both together in the room when he died."

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"Taking a holiday, eh?" Sir Torrens asked indifferently, with his eyes fixed on the columns

of his morning paper. "Well, go out and enjoy it!"

"Not exactly a holiday, sir. Fact is, I am on the look-out for another berth. A better paid one."

"What, doesn't Lady Elizabeth give you enough?" Sir Torrens asked. "That's the way of charitable folk, I believe."

"Twenty pounds a year, sir. I am worth more."

"Really?"

"Yes. Fifty pounds is my figure. I could do nicely with that."

Torrens put down his paper at last, and stared at the boy. Barney's slanting dark eyes returned the look without flinching this time.

"And what would you do to be worth that?" Sir Torrens asked, with a smile of toleration.

"I would hold my tongue."

"Would it really be worth that?"

There was a note of irony in Torrens' mellow voice, a challenge in his gay blue eyes.

Barney felt that he must speak more plainly.

"You see, sir," he said, in confidential tones which he had some difficulty in keeping steady, "the worst of me is my dreams. I'm a very handy lad, 'specially about a stable, as I'm fond of horses and used to 'em. I was page-boy when I was twelve, and errand-boy afore then. The only thing against me is my dreams."

"Dreams? They don't get in the way of your work, I suppose?"

"But they do, sir! And they come upon me by daylight, too. There you are, a-sitting in that chair, quite firm and real. Yet while I looks at you, seems to me I can see you somewhere else, and a doing of quite different things."

Sir Torrens laughed with apparent enjoyment.

"This is very quaint!" he exclaimed.
"What do you see me do?"

"Stand with your back to a big fire, and presently open letters as isn't addressed to you, and read them, and put them in the fire—"

"Stop, Barney! I cannot have you imagine such a thing, even in a dream! It would not be the act of a gentleman!"

"There you are, sir! But I can't help dreaming it. Presently someone else comes along, with a face summat like yours, as I seem to know. And talk comes, a lot of talk I won't tell you now. But I've got it all pat, written down—"

"Do you actually write down these silly fancies?"

"I do, sir! All about the price of a mare, and the jolly life a man leads on nothing, and his being turned out of college, and the army. And then his being so clever with his pen in copying, particular his old aunt's writing. And then a lot more about the price of an estate, and angry talk about cheating and lies and forgery—"

"You don't mean to tell me you dream all this!"

"Every bit! As clear and plain as I see you now. And you so cool and quiet. Until it comes to threatening, and the other man saying he would use some papers he had against you unless the place was sold for five thousand pounds to—"

"Stop, my boy! I have no time to listen to all this rubbish! If you have such dreams it is not surprising you can't keep your situations. You must be a little bit wrong in the head!"

Sir Torrens spoke so naturally, with such decision and calmness, that Barney would have been disconcerted had he not suddenly perceived that the white, well-kept hand with which the baronet was stroking his moustache was quivering. Torrens' nerves, after thirty-six years of "enjoying life," were not equal to his audacity.

The sight encouraged Barney to farther oratory.

"It do seem like madness, doesn't it, sir? And worse comes after. For you seems to alter as the other man keeps on worriting you, and your face gets hard and cruel-like. And on a sudden you up and hits him a blow that downs him, and you jumps upon him, and half-strangles him while he cries for help and for brandy—"

"Infernal nonsense!" Sir Torrens cried irritably as he rose from the table and stood before the fire with his back turned to Barney. "You must get off now, my boy. I have no time to waste listening to crazy dreams!"

Barney wiped his forehead, which had grown moist with the excitement of his story-telling.

"It's nearly over, sir," he murmured. "And s'elp me if it warn't an awful sight I shan't forget to my dying day! And the young lady's voice outside, while you was a hunting for papers as you couldn't find, which was natural, as they were—"

"Yes?" Sir Torrens put in, turning round to face him as Barney halted in his story. "Where were these wonderful papers?"

"That's just it, sir! It's all a crazy dream, as you put it. In the dream they were in my pocket."

Sir Torrens took his place at the breakfast table again, and began to help himself to toast and marmalade.

"I suppose you want another sovereign for that long story," he suggested indulgently as he felt in his pocket.

"No, sir. I want something permanent, since you are so kind as to ask me. Chiswick, is too slow for me, and the pay isn't good enough. I am not going back there."

"You are such an amusing little chap," the baronet observed, with his coffee cup in his hand, "that I'm hanged if I won't give you a chance in my own service! My man here is leaving. I am going to have a woman to cook and clean by the day. How would you like to valet and wait on me, sleeping here, of course? Later on I may be able to give you some stable-work; but this would be a beginning. And since you have so much imagination and so much cheek, I'll pay you the pound a week you've set your heart on!"

"Live here?" stammered Barney.

"Why not? I cannot afford to pay you all that for nothing. I want another man, and to humour you I'll put up with a lad, if you do your work properly. You seem a clever boy and I daresay I may make something of you. But I only help you on these conditions."

Barney reflected for a few seconds while the baronet, who had finished eating, lit a cigarette, and turning his chair, stretched out his feet to warm them before the fire.

Dared he take the situation?

Sir Torrens would be out a good deal, for certain. The work would be easy, the food and pay excellent, and the opportunities for petty larcenies plentiful: they could hardly be

punished severely by his employer, considering their respective positions.

From stable-lad to groom, from groom to gentleman's gentleman!

These were bewildering rises of fortune in the course of a month for a lad not yet sixteen!

Yet—was it wise?

This man, who appeared so good-humoured and agreeable, so easily pleased and benevolent, was at bottom, as Barney well knew, a "rank bad 'un," a man who never had, never could, and never would "run straight," who would "stick at nothing" to gain his ends, and who for all his charm of manner, must be totally destitute of conscience, of honour, and of pity.

"Same time," reflected Barney, "he can't very well strangle or poison me. We don't live in melodrama or the Middle Ages. Seems natural he should want to keep me under his eye, knowing what I know. And I'm hanged if there isn't something about him that makes me feel I'd like to wait on him!

"He'd be near at hand to squeeze when I wanted money, too.

"And I'd be able to prevent him making up to Miss Reine. Just a hint that I wouldn't stand it and would tell her—say, while I'm putting his coat on, or giving him a brush down.

"He won't help me unless I come, so there ain't anything else to do.

"But I'll take precautions against my gentleman's tricks, all the same!

"Well, Barney," Sir Torrens said as he knocked the ash off his cigarette, and turned a smiling face over his shoulder towards the boy, "am I to have the satisfaction of engaging you as my servant?"

"Proud and honoured, sir! When do wish me to join you?"

"This evening, if you like. You can be here at six. I am sick of this fellow I have. I gave him notice for his laziness and impudence several days ago. Remember, I like politeness. Also sobriety and moderate honesty. And no more dreams, if you please!"

"No, sir. I will try to please you in every way. Good-morning!"

It was hardly the conquering note he wished to sound, Barney realized, as he descended the stairs. And that odd feeling of apprehension at the back of his mind was worrying. Nevertheless, it was a fine beginning to his career of blackmail to be engaged for light duties at the rate of fifty pounds a year.

Barney walk thoughtfully down the street towards Piccadilly. Suddenly remembering Mr. Hunt, he doubled unexpectedly and faced him.

"Ah, Hunt," he said, affecting an air of condescension, "you can take a message for me back to my uncle Timothy. Tell him to send my clothes to Folkestone Street, care of Sir Torrens Hatherleigh. I shall be on a visit to that gentleman."

Hunt looked up and down with wrathful scorn.

"Has he engaged you to clean the knives?" he inquired.

"He has engaged me to valet him, which is a berth you couldn't get, I'll swear," Barney retorted. "On'y at St. Ursula's, where off colour characters are a recommendation, can you get a shop, my man!"

Then, in some fear lest the chauffeur might seize his collar and shake him, as he had done

more than once already, Barney set off at a run in the direction of Leicester Square.

In the neighbourhood of Aldridge's he made certain inquiries, which brought him to the door of a house not far from the "Dials," the ground-floor of which was occupied by a dog fancier, and the second floor flat of which was tenanted by Mr. Gridley, "of London and Newmarket," and his wife and children.

There was at first no answer to his knock.

Then a well-remembered voice, loud and marked by a strong country accent, sang out : "Turn the handle and come in, you silly idiot, whoever you are! I've got my hands full!"

The owner of the voice was standing in the kitchen, with a baby in her arms and two children of apparently two or three years of age tugging at her skirts, while she stirred some savoury mixture over the fire, and gave a lesson in cooking to a slipshod little servant, who was on her knees, scrubbing the floor.

Disorder reigned supreme. The woman who carried the baby had evidently been very handsome in a coarse, gipsy style. Her luxuriant masses of black hair fell over her face and half-way down her back, and her fine form, inclining to stoutness, was clad in a torn petticoat of red flounced silk, and a loose wrapper of sprigged cotton, which had passed its first freshness.

"There's me throwin' away half-a-crown a week on a useless chit like you," she was exclaiming to the kneeling handmaid, "and givin' you lessons in high-class cookery, and all for what? You're more trouble than all my brats, and as soon as you've learned anything you'll be off to better yourself, as you call it.

I know the way they rears such as you. What do you want, young man?"

The contrast between this scene and the one he had just quitted, between dainty neatness and elegance and slovenly mismanagement, struck Barney so strongly that it infused a supercilious tone in his voice.

"It is three years since you have seen me," he said, "but I have not forgotten you, and—"

"Good luck! It's Barney!"

Somehow she disposed of the baby, whether by dropping it into the arms of the "help," or throwing it down, he could not tell. All he knew was that his mother rushed at him, enveloped him in a hug of passionate affection, and burst out crying.

"To think as it's you!" she murmured. "Barney, I've had an awful time last few days thinking about you. And when I threw the cards it a'most killed me to see how they came out. And dream about you last night I did, and saw you walk straight into a cage where a tiger was hid, and you not knowing of it, and me being unable to stop you! I screamed myself awake, I did, and Ben was quite upset about me. But here you are, alive and fit and well, and I dare say as bad a boy as ever, while I was eating my heart out about you! Well, deary, I won't trust to the cards any more! For they told me you was in dreadful danger!"

CHAPTER XV

MRS. OSBORNE'S DISCOMFITURE

"POKING her nose into everything!" muttered Jackson, Dr. Robert Osborne's man, to the cook. "Them sort of women is more than flesh and blood can stand."

The cook, who was housekeeper and "general," with a maid who came by the day, heartily agreed with him.

"She's at the linen cupboard now," the cook said, "and she half-accused me of having done away with the best sheets until they was found in a parcel. Then she says, says she, that the house linen was neglected and wanted darning. 'And who's to darn it, ma'am?' I asks. That's all! But I 'eld 'er with my eye. Fanny and I both does a bit of sewing now and again; but what with keeping the Doctor's clothes neat and tidy, mending his socks and so on, I should like to know what we 'ave time for? I was only waiting for her to say: 'You,' to me to give notice. And she knowed it, and kep quiet, luckily for 'er!"

The lady under discussion was Dr. Osborne's mother, who was making her presence felt in her son's home in Merehampton.

The more fault she found with existing things the more likelihood she thought there would be of Robert's heart softening towards Miss Kathleen Pringle. So far, she had only once broached the subject of her chosen

daughter-in-law, to be met by scant encouragement.

"Pringle, Pringle," Robert had repeated in an absentminded fashion. "Do I know her? Oh yes, a friend of the girls, wasn't she? With a long nose?"

It was not a good beginning. Mrs. Osborne had, with what she considered supreme tact, denied the abnormal length of Kathleen Pringle's nose, and let the subject drop. Daily she drew her son's attention to little wants and negligences in his household, and regretted the fact that she could not keep away from the "dear girls" much longer in order to see after his comforts.

"You really will have to marry. It will be so much better for your practice. Ladies don't care to be attended to by a single man," she had remarked on more than one occasion.

She was in correspondence with Miss Pringle and urging her to accept an invitation to spend Christmas with some friends at Chagford, who were among Dr. Osborne's patients.

Propinquity, she felt, was all that was required to make her son sensible of Kathleen's desirability as a doctor's wife.

This very day she had determined to "tackle" Robert again upon the subject, and her mind was busily occupied in planning what she would say as she went over the contents of his chest of household linen.

At a quarter to twelve she went downstairs with a bundle of things for Fanny to darn. The doctor was out on his rounds, and Jackson was away on his bicycle, delivering medicines, for Dr. Osborne dispensed himself, after the fashion of country practitioners.

Mrs. Osborne went into the consulting-room

in search of Fanny, whom she had been unable to find in the kitchen, and then passed through the folding doors to the inner room. She trod very lightly, partly because she was small and daintily made, and partly because she had cultivated a habit of creeping about softly in order to surprise servants who were neglecting their work.

This time she surprised someone else; a young lady in black, fast asleep in an armchair. Reine Hatherleigh was tired out.

She had not been to bed on the previous night, and had walked from Chiswick to Waterloo, and about the neighbourhood of the station until the train for Merehampton started at a little after six a.m.

She had come straight to "Bob's" house on her arrival. All thought of his mother had gone out of her head. She wanted to talk to Bob and ask his advice. He was the only person who could tell her what to do, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world to come to him with her troubles.

Her old acquaintance Jackson had shown her into the study.

"Let the doc. know I'm here as soon as he comes. I'm dead beat, Jackson, and I'll have a nap while I'm waiting."

Jackson liked Miss Hatherleigh and detested Mrs. Osborne, and thought it no part of his duty to inform the latter of the young lady's arrival before he went out on his bicycle.

Mrs. Osborne, therefore, entering with her arms full of sheets and towels, and her head full of her son's marriage with Miss Pringle, discovered the girl Robert was foolish enough to love, and whom she herself heartily disliked, asleep in his study.

Long black eye-lashes on rosy cheeks paled by fatigue, a red-lipped pouting mouth which drooped a little at the corners, a low white brow from which curls of silky hair were tossed; all these things might have seemed attractive to a man; but in Mrs. Osborne the sight of them aroused keen annoyance, just when she thought the neighbourhood well rid of this odious young woman who had somehow contrived to steal Robert's heart!

Tired out she might be, but she had no right to take such a liberty as to go to sleep in the study. Mrs. Osborne set herself coughing loudly until she woke her.

Deep blue eyes, clear and candid as a child's, opened in a startled fashion. Reine stared up at the prim little lady in grey, and did not at first recognise her or realize her surroundings. Then, as consciousness returned, she reddened, shook herself, and jumped up.

"I am in Merehampton, of course," she murmured half to herself, "and at Dr. Osborne's. I did not know you were still here. How do you do, Mrs. Osborne?"

"How do you do, Miss Hatherleigh? I had no idea that you were staying in this neighbourhood."

The girl had flung her hat and gloves upon a chair, and with them a small hand-bag, upon which Mrs. Osborne's eyes were fixed. Did this preposterous young person intend taking up her residence under Dr. Osborne's roof, or what was the meaning of that bag?

"I am not staying here," Reine replied. "I came down by the six fifteen from London."

"An uncomfortably early train to travel by, was it not?" inquired Mrs. Osborne, who was tingling with curiosity. "But, of course, you

are used to early rising, as I have heard that you go cub-hunting every season. I suppose you missed that amusement a good deal in London? You were last out with the hounds on the morning of your father's funeral, were you not?"

Reine reddened and then grew pale.

"I was out," she said after a pause, trying to control her voice, "but I was not with the hounds."

"I thought there must be some mistake," Robert's mother observed. "But a great many people thought they saw you, and talked about it all over Merehampton."

Reine snatched up her hat, and began to put it on with fingers which shook a little.

"If you'll excuse me," she said, "I will walk up and down the street while I wait for Dr. Osborne."

"Pray do not let me drive you away, Miss Hatherleigh, if you wish to consult my son. I have to do the honours in his absence, you see, until he marries. It is so much better for a general practitioner to be a family man. A doctor's wife is often of such use to him socially. Don't you think so?"

"I haven't thought about it," replied poor Reine, who, already tired and dispirited, felt that she could not endure another five minutes of Mrs. Osborne's society.

She took her bag and gloves, bowed coldly to the doctor's mother, and was marching through the consulting room to the front door when it opened to admit the sturdy, well-knit frame and kindly, fresh-coloured face of Robert Osborne.

Reine laid both her hands on his shoulders, and spoke with something like a sob in her voice.

"Come out in the street and talk to me, Bob!" she said. "I've run away!"

He took her hand and drew it through his arm to lead her into the study, where his mother was waiting for them, pink with vexation.

"Do you mind leaving us alone, mater?" he said gently. "Reine wants to talk to me about her private affairs."

As the door closed on the retreating form of the indignant little lady, he made Reine sit down.

"First of all: have you had any breakfast?" he asked.

"No. Of course that's partly why I feel so down. Near Waterloo I got a cup of coffee at a stall at five this morning and some bread. That's all."

"We will have lunch earlier—"

"No, Bob! I can't eat with your mother at the table! I'm sorry, but she hates me and she shows it. It isn't food I want, but advice. And I felt I must see a friend!"

"You must drink a glass of wine and eat some biscuits while you tell me all about it."

"All right! if you bring me them, I will. But I want you!"

She had no idea how deeply she touched him by her confiding friendship. She was only a big child, he felt, in spite of her height and her muscles and her sporting tastes, and this morning the fatigue of the journey and the unwonted agitation at her heart had lent an appealing softness to her face and bearing.

He sat beside her, listening, and plying with her biscuits, and the whole tale, or at least all that part which concerned Lady Elizabeth and life at the Retreat, came out. As a reason for the system of spying and the discontinuance of

her rides, Reine gave it that her guardian "wanted to make me promise not to see people I knew."

"So I couldn't stand it any longer," she concluded, "and made a bolt. That ghost business was odd, wasn't it? You can see the mark of the bite it gave me on my hand. I think I can guess which of the sour-faced women it was. But, Bob, could I go on living there in such a fashion?"

"No," he answered gravely. "I think you are well out of it. I don't like that ghost part at all. I think Lady Elizabeth should be told. Do you want me to write to her?"

"I am not going back!"

"No, my dear. I myself, as your trustee, would not allow you to do so. Where would you like to stay?"

"I want to go back to my home."

"But it is not your home any longer!"

She sprang from her seat, and faced him with tears shining in her eyes.

"It's no good, Bob!" she exclaimed. "I can't live anywhere else! I don't fit, somehow. I do and say the wrong things, and I'm so unhappy. It isn't only that I can't somehow breathe in London, and that I miss the wind of Dartmoor and the freshness, and feel as though I were chained as well as suffocated; but at home people and things seemed to love me and I loved them! Even the furniture and the old walls were friends. I was part of the place, you see. And life was easy and natural. Now it is growing so difficult—"

"Have you told me everything?" he asked gently as she paused.

He was longing with all his heart to tell her that everything he had in the world was hers,

and that he at last had reason to hope for a great and brilliant piece of luck, by which he would no longer be a wholly unsuitable candidate for her hand.

No one knew of it as yet, and even to him the thing was so fresh and unexpected that he hardly dared to consider it as a certainty. But with Reine coming to him in such utter faith and confidence, his lips were sealed.

He could not be, as he told himself, "such an utter cad" as to take advantage of her friendlessness and homelessness to press a suit to which he feared she would be indifferent.

"The poor child might listen to me because she has nowhere to go," he told himself, "and for that very reason I must hold my tongue."

Now, as she remained silent and looked troubled when he asked her if everything had been told to him, a pang of jealousy shot through his heart.

Had he a rival younger, handsomer, and more eligible?

"I feel sure," he said, "that there is something more to say, my dear?"

"Well, there's Torrens! I suppose you know, I mean you guess, that's he's trying to make up to me? It's about him that Lady Elizabeth and I had our set-to. She can't say enough against him. And he seems afraid of her. Says she brings him ill-luck. He told me a long story about knowing her husband out in India, and quarrelling with him. And she took her husband's part, naturally."

"Then you have seen a good deal of Sir Torrens?"

"He was at the Chase," Reine replied, conscious that she was blushing furiously. "And I pulled him out of the Barrow Pool."

Then he was—going on in a silly sort of way, you know, when Lady Elizabeth came in. She was awfully insulting; I wonder he stood it. He wrote to me at the Retreat, sending the letter by Esther, and asked me to meet him in Rotten Row. So I did, and that little sneak Barney Lucas, who had the care of my horses, blabbed. Then the band played! That's all!"

"I don't think it is really all, Reine!"

"Well, you know what I mean! It's all that happened. As to what he said; all stuff, of course, about loving me, and all that—"

"Do you call it 'stuff?'"

"Don't tease, Bob! He lives in Folkestone Street, and wanted me to come and see him there. I have begged him to let me buy the Chase. He says he won't unless I marry him."

"Do you want to?"

She turned sharply away that he might not see her burning cheeks, and began to walk up and down the room.

"I don't know," she said after a long pause.

"I don't think so. He makes me feel excited and—jumpy. I want to see him again, and then when he's there I rather want to get away. It isn't only what Lady Elizabeth said; Dad always told me he was a wrong 'un, and I suppose he knew. He hated him because of the entail. Still, he didn't want me ever to know him. Old Welfare pretends he is a perfect saint. But she's a silly old gossip, and I am sure he isn't. The worst of it is, Bob, I feel he isn't good! I don't seem want to be told. Perhaps you don't remember what his eyes are like?"

"They are handsome, and blue, I believe."

"They are the brightest blue I ever saw, with curly brown lashes, and they always seem to have a smile in them. But all the time as

I look at him I seem to hear, 'Don't trust him! The eyes are false!' Yes, that's the word, and that's what I feel, even when he's being amiable and funny and affectionate and all that! It is no good telling you I don't like him. I keep on thinking of him, and going over things he said, and remembering how he looked when he said them. And yet I feel no belief or confidence in him. Look how different it is when I'm with you! There's nothing I couldn't tell you. I want your help and advice over every difficulty, and even when there aren't any difficulties, I want your—sympathy—that's what it is. Bob, you never heard me talk so much, I am sure! But I feel worried, and for days I've been keeping it in. I must get my home back, and Torrens says he will sell it right off unless I marry him. And he'll do it at once, he says. I don't say I won't marry him; I don't know. I believe I should be unhappy. And I don't want to be forced into it in a hurry before I know my own mind, for the sake of the Chase. Now, I've come to you to find a way out-of it. I only know of one. You and Wilbrahams must buy the Chase for me out of my money, without letting Torrens know whom it is for."

Dr. Osborne shook his head.

"I have already talked with Mr. Sidney Wilbrahams on the subject, and Lady Elizabeth has also consulted him about it. Both of them refuse unconditionally to allow the purchase. You know, do you not, that the property is already in the market, and that Sir Torrens wants twenty-five thousand pounds?"

"Well, then, pay it, pay it for me! Surely I can do what I like with my own money!"

"Not for over two years yet. And, though

it is an interesting old place, historically and architecturally, there isn't much land, and it is a long way from a railway station; twenty-five thousand is too high a price to pay. Eighteen thousand would be ample, now that land has gone down—"

"But I tell you I don't care! When all my happiness depends upon it, what do a few thousands matter? I want my home back, whatever it costs!"

"Reine, I have no power to help you over this."

"You mean you won't!" she cried perversely. "Do you want to force me into a marriage with Torrens just in order to get the Chase?"

She was sorry the next moment that she had said the words. It was impossible not to note their effect upon Robert Osborne. Reine had always known that he loved her; but she had not guessed how dearly until she saw the look of pain in his eyes at her undeserved reproach.

"I want you, when you marry, to be happy with a man you can love and respect," he answered gravely. "But, Reine, you are no longer a child. You must know better than to let yourself be driven into anything so serious as marriage even by your longing to have your home again. Consider: you could not live there alone. And I suppose you would not care to have Lady Elizabeth with you, even if she could come?"

"I have some other relations, you know," the girl said. "There's my uncle Derrick. He wrote me an awfully kind letter about Dad's death, and said a lot about wanting me to know my new aunt. I dare say she isn't so bad: she can't be more awful to live with than

Lady Elizabeth. Why shouldn't they stay with me? They never have any money at Larne and live on debts. So they might like me to put them up. Uncle Derrick and I have always been pals."

"That gives me an idea, Reine! Where did Lord Newtown write from? And when did you get his letter?"

"The day before yesterday. He wrote and told me they were taking a flat near Park Lane, and wanted me to stay with them."

"Let me see! Who was it he married? Hetty Delarue, wasn't she called? Didn't she play the Captain of the Forty Thieves at Drury Lane one year?"

"I don't know anything about her except that Dad told me Uncle Derrick had made an awful fool of himself. But I saw her portrait in the papers. She looked handsome and jolly, I thought."

"I wonder if it would do for you to stay with them for a little while until we can arrange something better?"

"I did have some idea of going to them from Chiswick last night. But I couldn't very well have knocked them up so late. And then I didn't know her, and I did so want to have a talk with you. Even if I go there, Bob, I feel sure I shan't stop. Uncle Derrick was a dear; but—he wanted managing! I wonder whether he gets it now? And I'm no good anywhere but in the country. Besides, Torrens won't wait."

"He will have to wait, at least until he gets someone who will offer him what he wants for the Chase. You came for my advice, my dear child: now you must follow it. Do nothing in a hurry: let me know all your plans. Perhaps I may have a scheme for helping you before

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long. It is twenty minutes to one. If you won't lunch here, will you lunch with me in the train as I take you back to London? No! Don't get rebellious! Not back to Chiswick, but to Lord Newtown's flat. I will leave you there, and go on to see Sidney Wilbrahams and Lady Elizabeth. At the station I must telegraph to them both, and to Lord Newton. I will stay the night in London, and call on you to-morrow to see how the arrangement works."

"Dear old Bob! Just like you! Of course I'll go with you! But remember what I came for: all this is only *pro tem*. I must get my home back!"

"Trust me; but don't expect everything in a hurry."

He rang the bell as he spoke.

"I have to go to London on business by the one twenty train, Jackson," he said. "Pack my bag and take it to the station. Miss Hatherleigh and I will walk. I have to send off some telegrams, so we must start at once. Explain things to Mrs. Osborne, and say I hope to be back to-morrow evening, unless I am detained. In that case I will telegraph."

The closing of the front door gave Mrs. Osborne the first intimation of what had happened. From the window of her bedroom she saw the tall girl in black and her son walking rapidly up the stone-paved street together.

At first she thought he had gone to "see her off" at the station. But as she hurried out to question the servants, she met Jackson running downstairs with his master's bag.

"Beg pardon, ma'am! Master's going to London with Miss Hatherleigh, and I was to tell you he will send you a telegram when he means to return home!"

CHAPTER XVI

PLIGHTED

"THE Earl and Countess of Newtown, of Larne Castle, have taken one of the sumptuous new flats in Clayton Street, Park Lane, for the winter season. Miss Reine Hatherleigh, only child and heiress of the late Sir John Hatherleigh, of the Chase, Dartmoor, and niece of Lord Newtown, will be staying with her aunt and uncle during their residence in London."

Torrens Hatherleigh read the news at his Club three days after Reine's flight from Chiswick. He put down the paper and burst out laughing.

"So that's where she went!" he exclaimed. "She will find her music-hall aunt a very different sort of guardian from Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh."

It was half past three in the afternoon; a suitable hour for calling. Torrens looked at himself in a mirror, gave a smile of satisfaction at the reflection, sent for a taxi, as he objected to soiling his boots in the mud and rain, and drove to Clayton Street, Park Lane.

The word "sumptuous" well described the new flats and their furniture, and also their rentals. The three "reception rooms" were very large, and all the bed-rooms, except the "best," were small and dark, with ground glass windows to block out the depressing view of the backs of London houses.

The amount of white enamelling and gilding, of long looking-glasses and of elaborate "Louis Quinze" tapestried furniture accorded ill with Torrens' taste.

"I couldn't live in such a setting," he reflected, "unless I bought some old covers for the things. No comfort anywhere. It would be like wearing new boots every day."

A man servant opened the door, and another took his card on a salver.

Torrens waited in the double drawing-room, and wondered, as he noted the gilded console tables, the etageres adorned with brand-new "old china," and the many electric lamps in showy fittings, whether by living in them the rooms would ever become really habitable.

He had plenty of time for reflection, as he was kept waiting nearly half an hour. Then, after a slight scuffling sound in the hall outside, as of someone finishing their toilet, the door of the drawing-room opened to admit one of the finest women he had ever seen, in a "tea-gown," grand enough to be in keeping with the furniture.

Henrietta Fitzalan, Countess Newtown, *née* Jessie Grimes, was meant by nature for the parts she had played in pantomines and on the music-hall stage of "show-girl," "principal boy," and the chief of the "Sisters Delarue, with song and dance." She was five feet eight in height, and did not need the tall French heels with which she cramped her walk and disfigured her feet, or the inordinate pressure by which she reduced a waist of twenty-five inches to one of twenty-two.

Her face on a smaller frame would have been pretty rather than beautiful. It was smooth and round and peach-like, regular of

feature, and lit by large china-blue eyes, which had an infantine stare she had been taught to consider irresistible.

To Torrens, who was a man of swift—if shallow—observation, it was amusing to note how this new recruit to the ranks of the aristocracy hovered in manner from the pert, free and easy, babyish ways she had always affected, and what she deemed to be an aristocratic languor suitable to her present rank.

In a few years she might possibly tone down to quite the "right thing." But just at present, with her over-dressed, over-waved, and over-gilded hair, her tight-fitting coral-coloured crêpe de chine tea gown, trimmed with passementerie and lace, and the powerful-scent of lily of the valley which hung about her, she realized the Countess of comic opera rather than the Countess of London Society.

She carried his card in her hand and glanced at it while she fastened her bracelet.

"Sir Torrens Hatherleigh," she said. "Pleased to see you, I'm sure. Pray be seated. Some relation of our dear Reine, are you not?"

Her voice was just what he had expected to hear, and what he had already heard across the footlights of various pantomime and variety theatres, clear and not unmusical, but marred by a strong cockney accent.

"I am Reine's second cousin," he explained. "I was so glad to read in the papers that she was with you. I always thought it a pity she ever went anywhere else."

"It was that silly old Sir John, I suppose," Lady Newtown said, with a sudden return to her natural manner. "He'd got it into his

Torrens look annoyed.

"Don't you think you might have remembered me?" he inquired.

Lady Newtown, who had been a much interested witness of the little scene, burst out laughing.

"You've had your nose put out of joint, it's clear, Sir Torrens!" she observed. "I liked that doctor fellow, and so did the Earl."

"The Earl," at that moment entered the drawing-room, having been out since the morning.

Lord Newtown was a tall, bored-looking man of fifty. His face was clean-shaven, and his fair hair was partly grey: his blue eyes were bloodshot and weary-looking, and his aquiline nose, humorous, loose-lipped mouth, and indefinite chin all conveyed an idea of the kindly irresolution which distinguished him.

He raised his eyebrows as Torrens' name was announced, and after exchanging a few sentences with him, he made an excuse for leaving the room with his wife.

Torrens glanced at the door to see that it was safely shut, and then caught Reine in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers before she could guess his intention.

"Let me go!" panted the girl, crimson and angry, yet stirred out of herself by the magnetic touch of the man. "I will ring the bell. I will have you turned out! How dare you?"

There were tears in her eyes and her voice was quivering.

It was insulting of him: it was cowardly! She told herself these things, but felt sure now that she loved him, even had she doubted the fact before.

"Forgive me, dear! I was so delighted to see you that I couldn't help it!"

"I shall not forgive you! I am very, very angry! I shall ask my uncle not to have you here again."

Torrens promptly dropped upon his knees in front of her.

"They'll come in again directly and find me like this unless you say you forgive me," he observed.

"Get up, Torrens, and don't be an idiot!" exclaimed the girl, forced to laugh in spite of her annoyance.

"Not unless you say: 'Dear Torrens, I forgive you.' I don't care a straw if they come in. I shall only say I love you passionately and that you got angry because I showed it."

"Get up, or I shall ring!"

"It will be much more uncomfortable for you than for me if the servant comes in."

"Dear Torrens, I forgive you. Get up!" she cried hastily, as she thought she heard the handle turned in the door. "No! Don't dare to come near me! I am disgusted with you. I don't really like or trust you: it was mean and ungentlemanly to behave like that!"

"You will learn to be awfully fond of me," he remarked as he got up and carefully dusted his knees with his handkerchief. "Lady Newtown has been telling me her marriage was 'a one-horse affair at a registry office.' Don't you think ours had better be the same? It must be quiet and secret, because Lady Elizabeth would never agree; and naturally that doctor fellow, who is sweet upon you himself, would refuse—"

"He doesn't need to. I should refuse to even think of it!"

He caught her hands suddenly and held them up against his breast while he looked down into

her face with passionate tenderness in his fine blue eyes.

It was not difficult for Torrens to feel tender towards a woman, and he really liked Reine. Had she not been to his taste, her fortune would not have tempted him, for marriage had never been to his liking, or he might on more than one occasion have won an heiress. As it was, the needle of all his fortunes seemed to point to Reine Hatherleigh, and he desired with all the heart he had to gain her.

"You won't refuse!" he whispered. "You know as well as I do that you love me. Why are you blushing and trembling unless you love me? Little goose! Why don't you own it?"

"Torrens, I begin to hate you! You get on my nerves: you worry me! I want you to go!"

"I am going. Have you nothing to say to me first about the Chase?"

"Yes, of course! You must let me buy it. I can't live here any more than I could live at Chiswick. They are very kind—I don't want to say a word against them. It must be my fault. But I don't fit!"

"I should think Lady Newtown must be a trial. Does she talk to you all the time about 'your uncle the Earl?'"

"Yes. It sounds odd, doesn't it? But it isn't only that. They keep hours that would break me. Play bridge until two, and get up at ten. I can't play cards and don't care about them, but they would teach me, and I don't want to be disagreeable. This room has been aired now; but last night it was so thick with smoke one couldn't see one's hands. And all the time somebody works the pianola until one's head seems as if it would split. Het—she says I am to call her 'Het'—said as I was in such

deep mourning she wasn't going to entertain at all. But last night there were seven people, six men and an old lady in a wig, Lady Wingford—

"Was she here?"

"Do you know her?"

"Everybody knows her in London. She is seventy-six, and goes anywhere if she can win a bit at cards."

"Anywhere! I suppose you mean if she were particular she wouldn't come here?"

"Not exactly. But, you see, Lady Newtown is on her trial, and ought to be awfully particular as to the sort of people she has about her for a few years. I am a nice one to preach! But I am a man, and that makes a big difference. This place is ghastly!"

"I hate the furniture, after the old things at the Chase. But it's only hired. Lady Newtown chose it. Uncle Derrick hates it, too. He calls it the 'ancestral Tottenham-Court-Road sticks.'"

"I suppose Uncle Derrick hasn't much voice in this household?"

"None at all. But he is a dear. Last night there was one of the men he didn't want me to talk to—"

"Who was it?"

"Major Wyndham."

"I should think not! He's an atrocious bad lot. Who else was here?"

"Two very Jewish-looking men called Cohen and Klapstock."

"Awful bounders!"

"Rather a nice lad called Teddy Baring, who's great at polo; a man they told me was an author, who said very funny things, but I am sure wasn't quite sober; and a horrid, red-faced old man called Lord Stavering."

"What a crew! I know every one of them, and there isn't one I would introduce my wife to."

"That reminds me! I have been told you have a wife already."

She was looking hard at him, and noted that he changed colour.

"Really!" he said calmly. "What is she like?"

"Carrotty hair, and fond of playing cards."

Torrens burst into a fit of laughter which sounded a little more boisterous than was usual with him.

"So she plays cards! Has she any other accomplishments?"

"I don't know. But is the story true?"

"My dear girl," he said gravely, "I suppose you are only chaffing. If I were married, should I be worrying you now to be my wife? Do you suppose I want to be prosecuted for bigamy? I knew quite well before I called here to-day that this place wouldn't suit you. You are not used to this sort of life, I am thankful to say, and it's not good for you. Lady Newtown isn't really a bad sort; but it doesn't happen to be your sort. In her own walk I never heard a word against her. All the gambling, late hours, chaffing and drinking and smoking, are what she is used to. But it's not the house for a young girl."

"No," she said thoughtfully. "And isn't it odd? I have smoked cigarettes for fun since I was a child, but I can't do it here. Nor yet use the least bit of slang among these friends. Het calls 'the boys.'"

"Stick to that! You must be got out of this, and the only way out is to marry me."

"No! The way out is for me to have the Chase and live there."

"With me. Sir Torrens and Lady Hatherleigh."

She caught her breath. After all, was he not right? She turned to him with a sudden timidity.

"You must let me think," she murmured.

"Dearest, you have had plenty of time to think already. No one must be consulted any more. Lady Elizabeth's spite against me would lead her to any measure if she got wind of it. I've adored you ever since you saved my life in that plucky way. It's absurd to pretend you don't care about me. We'll be quietly married at once by special licence, have a sea trip for a honeymoon, and settle down to happiness together on Dartmoor. Kiss me, and I shall know you agree."

She tried to think, but he had taken her hands in his, and her heart beat so fast that she could not collect her ideas.

This must be love, this tremulous, nervous excitement which made her quiver at his touch, and grow hot and cold at his approach!

The longing, too, which crept over her, and to which she was utterly a stranger, to nestle close in his arms and find exquisite delight in his mere proximity, this also must be the love she had heard of but never known.

All the time she turned the subject over in her agitated mind, he, the practised man of the world of twice her age, was drawing her gently nearer to him, so that when at last she raised her head to speak, his lips were close to hers.

Somehow, before her decision was formed, they met in a kiss.

CHAPTER XVII

REINE'S LOVE LETTER

"My dear girl," said the Earl to his wife, "we are in a corner. I didn't tell you, but I had a long wire this morning from Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh. She asked me to meet her at the office of Reine's lawyer, a fellow called Wilbrahams, who managed Jack's business and is the girl's trustee. Of course I had to go, couldn't do less."

"Why in the world couldn't you tell me?" inquired his irate lady. "You said you were going to the city on business—course I thought you were trying to raise a bit, as usual."

"Well, I did go to the city on business, only it was Reine's business. The old lady was quite reasonable. She isn't really old, by the way; but she's got up like Mary Queen of Scots, turned funeral mute. That's her pose, you know. Jolly bad stock she comes from; the Wendovers never could run straight. Suppose she's trying to atone for the sins of the family! Anyhow, she pretended to be glad the girl was with us, and was quite ready to hand over the care of her, if the two trustees agreed. It's only five hundred a year, and Reine has another five hundred herself until she's one and twenty or married. But Lady Elizabeth made one condition: Reine is not to see or have any dealings with Torrens Hatherleigh, the very fellow who is talking to her in the drawing-room now!"

"What's wrong with him?"

"Everything! No money, no character——"

"He seems quite a nice boy. I never saw such eyes in my life. His eye-lashes are actually longer than mine!"

"We are not talking of his eye-lashes, but of his morals and his money."

"I don't suppose he is a bit worse than you or some of your set."

"Now, look here, Het, I won't be talked to in this way! It isn't my fault that land has gone down and that Larne is mortgaged. Even if I make a few rascally tradesmen wait for their over-charged bills, I play fair with my friends. People aren't afraid to play cards or do a deal in horses with me. And in love affairs I know what honour means. I don't poach on other men's preserves. Hatherleigh has got a bad name all round. I knew of it before Lady Hatherleigh spoke. She's quite right in keeping him away from dear little Reine."

"Dear little Reine is nearly six feet high and jolly well able to take care of herself. I don't suppose Sir Torrens means more than a flirtation with her. He's too good-looking, that's what sets all you men against him!"

"Good-looking or not, I won't have him flirting with Reine here."

"You are jealous!" cried the lady, with a loud peal of laughter.

Then a spirited quarrel occupied the pair until it finished in the usual way, with tears from the woman and caresses and apologies from the man.

There was a good deal of real affection between the oddly assorted couple, who shared trivial tastes, a love of extravagant hospitality,

and a lack of order, common sense, and moderation.

Nevertheless, Lord Newtown got his wife to understand that Sir Torrens' visits must cease.

"It's my business to look after Reine while she's under my roof," he said. "She's a nice little girl, and I don't want her to be made miserable. Besides, I gave my word to Lady Elizabeth, and you know, my pet, I don't break that."

"Of course I'll do anything to please my dear old boy, and Reine mustn't be snapped up by a fellow that's 'broke.' Both Klapstock and Stavening gave me the tip last night that they'd come down handsome if they could marry her. I suppose it's the five thousand a year; for she isn't much to look at, no figure and no style! I really must try to dress her better!"

"She's very nice as she is, and you'd only spoil her," Lord Newtown observed. "What I'd like you to do is to get into proper society with her and through her. Old women with sons might be glad to know her. It isn't the right thing, you know, only men calling here."

"Do you think I want to be insulted by a lot of stupid, boring old cats who'd look down on me because I was a good, honest girl, earning my living as a professional," screamed Lady Newtown. "None of 'em half as good as me, or a quarter as good-lookin', and cheat at bridge, they do, and—"

"For mercy's sake, Het, don't bawl!" protested her husband; and the domestic skirmish which followed delayed them until some minutes after Torrens Hatherleigh's departure.

He had left Reine an altered being, with soft eyes and quivering lips, changeful colour, and a riotously beating heart.

That parting kiss had changed her view of things. She was so unused to love-making in any form that to her it was a great, even in some way, a sacred moment.

She had kissed Torrens of her own accord, and her heart went with her lips. Naturally, from her point of view, she must marry him.

In some dim way she hoped and believed that by affection, she would succeed in "making another man of him." She could not credit that he was really very bad. Her instincts had told her so. But now she assured herself that in her ignorance of the world they might well have played her false.

She reminded herself, too, that she had been prejudiced against Torrens by her father, who hated the man who would take the family estate from his daughter.

"Surely," Reine told herself, "if Dad knew we were going to live at the Chase together, two Hatherleighs, he would be glad. I wonder he never thought of that way out of it.

"And if Torrens were not tired of roaming about, and of the go ahead life they tell me he leads, would he want to settle down at the old place?

"It was absurd to listen to Esther Yeo's tattle, and Lady Elizabeth has her own reasons for hating Torrens.

"How could anyone be bad and look as he does?

"One can see right down into those blue eyes of his, as though they were a child's.

"How brave he was in that horrible bog, never complaining, facing death so splendidly!

"Could he have done that if he had really had dreadful things on his conscience?

"And how gentle he was to me when Dad died.

"I must just stand in the middle of the room where he kissed me, and shut my eyes and remember it before I go to my room to think it all over again. Reine, my girl, you are over head and ears in love, and there's no getting out of it!"

It was while she was standing in the middle of the drawing-room, reconstituting her little love scene that her uncle and his wife rejoined her.

"Has your young man gone?" Lady Newtown began in that penetrating voice which Reine had already grown to dislike. "Because he can't come here again. Not good enough for you, my child! In future you must give him the go by."

"Do you mean that you don't want me to see my father's cousin any more?" asked Reine, whose colour had suddenly left her cheeks.

"My dear Reine," Lord Newtown intervened, "Het has put it crudely; but after what I heard this morning from Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, we cannot have Sir Torrens here." "Then I shall meet him somewhere else!" Reine unexpectedly declared.

The arrival of a visitor prevented any further discussion. The footman brought a card to Lady Newtown, upon which was inscribed "Mrs. William Devereux," and an address in Queen's Gate.

Lady Newtown read the name aloud.

"She's a friend of ours," Reine explained. "She stayed at the Chase several weeks last winter for the hunting. I suppose she read in the papers I was here, as Torrens did."

Mrs. "Willie" Devereux was tiny and taking and very smart. She felt a good deal of

curiosity on the subject of Lord Newtown's wife from the music-halls, and she gazed at her light pink chiffon tea-gown with genuine interest.

"Dot" Devereux was nearly fifty, and had lived in India; but by extreme activity and incessant riding she had retained a girlish slenderness of figure. Her face was so thickly powdered that the many wrinkles were almost lost sight of, and with her admirably dyed chestnut hair crowned by a large hat, she looked five and thirty, under a lace veil.

She stood on tip-toe to kiss Reine affectionately on the cheek.

"So immensely glad to see you again!" she said. "Hadn't a notion where you were. Of course I wrote to you at the Chase; but I dare say you never had the letter."

"Yes, I did, and thank you for it," Reine said as she introduced her uncle and his wife.

"You can't think how pleased I am Reine is in your care," Mrs. Devereux said to them. "I hope I had some share in bringing that about. Poor dear Jack Hatherleigh wrote to me only about a month ago, asking me certain questions about another relative in whose care he thought of leaving Reine. I answered, strongly advising him not to do it. Of course at the time there was no idea that he would die in that sudden and dreadful way."

"He never got your letter," Reine said. "Or at least, he said nothing about it. And he didn't act upon it. He made Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh my guardian."

"Really! Then why are you not with her?"

"I couldn't stand it and I ran away."

"Quite right, too! I never could bear Betty Hatherleigh!"

"She does a tremendous amount of good, I

believe," observed Lord Newtown, who was always ready to believe the best he could of his fellow-creatures.

"Does she? That's what I should really like to know," little Mrs. Devereux remarked. "There's a lot of talk and show of goodness, of course. I meet her now and then out, and we punctiliously cut each other. When I remember poor dear Ronald Hatherleigh and the way in which she treated him, I feel unbelieving about her saintliness!"

"But was she not very fond of her husband?" Reine inquired. "She speaks of him as though she worshipped him."

"She may, now that he is dead. She certainly did not while he was alive!" Mrs. Devereux returned drily. "But, my dear little girl, I can't explain all that to you. I did go into it all very thoroughly, though, in my letter to your father. 'I shan't believe in Betty's charity until I have seen her accounts.'"

"What fun!" exclaimed Lady Newtown. "Do you mean she 'cooks' them?"

"I don't want to be libellous, and I hate saying anything unkind," protested Dot Devereux, who passed a great part of her time in retailing scandalous stories about her acquaintances. "But when Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh goes round with the hat over her pet schemes, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if some of the money she collects was put on the back of a horse."

Reine did not quite believe her. In her own mind, indeed, she was asking herself, whether Dot Devereux was the lady who caused all the quarrel out in India years ago by her flirtations with Major Hatherleigh and his cousin Captain Torrens.

But the effect of her visit was certainly to lessen Reine's sense of any duty owed to her former guardian.

There was something of the wayward child's perversity about Sir John's daughter, and the fact that everyone was trying to prevent her from seeing Torrens lent extra charm to his personality.

"If I could get the Chase without him, should I take him?" she asked herself.

Then, with a swift blush, the answer came:

"Of course I should, since I have let him kiss me!"

"What did I tell Bob Osborne? That he was forcing me into a marriage with Torrens by not letting me buy back my home with my own money.

"Do I need any forcing, though, to make me marry Torrens?"

"Bob kept on telling me to do nothing in a hurry, and to trust to him and wait, as he might have a plan to help me.

"But 'might have' and waiting are too slow!

"I see quite well I shan't be able to live here. I can't stand the men visitors, and though I am sure Uncle Derrick's wife means to be kind, yet—well, I don't feel as if I ever wanted to smoke a cigarette or speak a word of slang again!

"Supposing I were to agree to marry Torrens very soon, I couldn't tell Bob. Torrens wouldn't let me, and of course he is right when he says Lady Elizabeth would do anything to prevent it if she got wind of it.

"How cruelly spiteful she seems!

"And nothing but a gambler herself, if Mrs. Devereux speaks the truth!

"Once I am married, I can do what I like with my money. Nobody can prevent me from buying the Chase then. And Torrens would have the money to pay his debts with.

"He has never tried to deceive me. He has always told me he had next to no money and heaps of debts.

"If I married him and we lived at the Chase, what rides we would have over the moors!"

Her eyes shone and her cheeks glowed at the thought.

Torrens had made her promise to write to him that same day in order to fix their next meeting. Up to this moment of her life Reine had detested letter-writing. But now, although she held the pen abominably and knew she could not spell, so great a desire to communicate with the man she loved came over her that she ran up to her room, and wrote her first love-letter:—

"My dear Torrens,

As soon as you had gone my uncle came in, and said he had seen Lady Elizabeth, and she had put him off you so much that you are never to come here again. Het backed him up and said I am to cut you. I said I would not. Then Mrs. Willie Devereux called, and began to run down Lady E. Said she was a humbug and a gambler, and that she had broken her husband's heart. I always thought she adored him. You said I was to tell you the day I would marry you. How can I when I shall not have a chance of seeing you? Perhaps I do like you rather, but I have heard a lot against you. I wish I could ask Bob Osborne's advice. But you say everything must be a secret. How will you arrange about our meeting? I do not care so very much, but still I like to see you. I expect there are mistakes in this. I do not like writing letters and I cannot spell. My love to you, dear Torrens,
Reine."

She ran out herself to slip the letter in the pillar box. Her letter arrived at Folkestone

Street that night, in the absence of the gentleman to whom it was directed.

Barney Lucas took it in, and recognised the sprawling writing of his late mistress, as well as her father's crest on the envelope.

Barney was righteously indignant.

In his character of self-constituted guardian to Reine's happiness, he steamed the letter open, and having mastered the contents, he sprang up from his chair and consulted the clock.

"Twenty past nine, and the boss doesn't come home till one or two in the morning. I shall have time to do it in a taxi. Anyhow, I'll risk it!" Barney said as he slipped on his coat and hat and let himself out of the front door.

CHAPTER XVIII

BARNEY'S DISCOVERY

It was half-past ten on a wet and disagreeable evening when Barney Lucas got out of his taxi-cab before the gates of St. Ursula's Retreat, Chiswick.

He had struck up a condescending acquaintance with the driver on the way, had discussed recent sporting events with him, and had imbibed in his company various hot drinks "to keep the damp out."

"Don't you fear, my boy," he said patronizingly to the man as he got out. "I am not one of your bilkers. You will be jolly well paid for this little jaunt, so you may wait here in peace until I come back to you. A friend of mine runs this house, a lady of title. I am bringing her family news of the greatest importance, and there's plenty of oof about to fill your pockets as well as mine."

A light was burning in the lodge, and in answer to Barney's ring Timothy Lucas, shivering in a great coat which he had put over his night-shirt, came in his slippers to open the door.

"Bless me, if it ain't Barney!" he exclaimed. "Got the sack already in your new shop, eh? Bin too free with your fingers, I expect! I thought it was too good to last. You're too sharp, that's what you are, my lad, and dunno when you are well off—"

"Stow that, nunkey! My taxi is outside, and I've jes come down on a visit to her ladyship while my boss is out for the evening."

Little weak-faced Timothy grinned in derision as he let in his nephew and closed the door.

"It's a pity your lordship took all that trouble," he observed. "Because her ladyship is out for the evening, too. Or at least she's supposed to be."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mr. 'Unt has been up to some odd tricks lately. I ony drive 'er ladyship during the day: waiting outside the grand 'ouses she goes to for to collect money ain't good for me, she says: I might get a drop of something to comfort my poor old inside! I keep the car clean and tidy, as you know well. 'Unt keeps 'is car allus under lock and key at the garage. Now and again he takes it out at night by the front way proper, and if I 'ear them coming 'ome, I can look out of my winder and see Lady E. come in through the gates and get out at the front door. 'Unt's very quiet and sly, and slips in and out o' this 'ouse like as if he was a jailer. But once or twice lately, not bein' able to sleep for want of a night-cap the last thing, I've caught 'im coming in at all sorts of hours. And says I: "What 'ave you been up to, Mr. 'Unt?" I says. "Taking 'er ladyship out, of course, in the car, yer silly fool," he answers pat. But between you and me and the bedpost, Barney, I don't believe it is 'er ladyship as 'Unt takes out like that! If it's 'er, why should he stop at the garage at the back surreptitious like, instead of coming in by the front in the ornery way? She'd 'ave to steal across the garden: I arsk you is it likely as 'er ladyship would do sich a thing."

"Easy enough to find out for yourself how things are. Why don't you go round to the garage and wait there until the car comes back."

"I know what my place is worth, thankee! Mr. 'Unt is a nasty one to deal with, and if he found me spying on him he'd 'alf murder me."

"You might make him pay up if you caught him," suggested Barney, with his thoughts intent as usual on blackmail.

"I might get turned off, more likely. 'Unt and my lady is very thick, and I often think you 'it it when you said he'd come down in the world. That's why I put up with his bullying, because he's got a sort of way of a lord about 'im. But there's been some queer stories about the last day or two. It was along of Esther Yeo, that stuck-up little bags of bones as was Miss Hatherleigh's maid. She went chattering about having seen a ghost in the passages, and then some gentleman friend of Miss Hatherleigh wrote and told 'er ladyship as 'ow a ghost had bitten 'er hand in garden. There was a rumpus, I can tell you! Esther Yeo came to the lodge and told me about it this very afternoon. Says she to me 'I am going back to my young lady, as can't do without me nohow. I am not likely to remain in service much longer," she says, "as so many gentlemen are after me with offers of marriage. But I'll just see if there's anything I can do for my young lady until she's wedded. It can't be expected I can stay a day longer in a place wot's haunted by mad dog ghosts wot bite," she says. Then she sent her love to you, and says you was a silly boy and much too fond of 'er, and took 'er 'ook in one of 'er young missus's 'ats, looking as like a wooden nut-cracker as anything you ever see."

"You ain't blest with brains," was the comment of Timothy's nephew. "Else you might have put two and two together about this ghost and Hunt's little games. Look at it this way. He's a broken-down gentleman, used to a gay life, I dessay, in the old days, as he can't be far short of fifty. It isn't much of a life for him here, taken on out of charity by Lady E., who may have been a friend of his before he went under. Hunt knows as all the women 'ere believe in this ghost. How about his arranging with one of these precious ladies as is given up to good works to take her out at night in her ladyship's car got up like a ghost so as to spoof anyone who saw her. She could easy change her dress in the car, and be as fine as she liked wherever she was a going to."

Timothy scratched his head, which was thinly covered by sandy and grey hair, and pondered a little before he spoke.

"If any of these ladies wants to go about amusing herself," he said at last, "why should they come 'ere at all? And once 'ere, there's no law to make 'em stop. We ain't among foreign papists and 'eathens."

"Now and then you 'ave a glimmer of sense," his nephew remarked. "But I can't waste any more time with you. If her ladyship's in, I must see her at once. If she ain't, I must wait till she comes back. What makes you think she's out?"

"Hunt being away," Timothy replied as he lighted his clay pipe and seated himself before the gas fire, "and me being consumed by a parching thirst, at a little before ten o'clock, what did I do but slip out of the lodge and run round to the Barge Aground by the back way along of the garden wall 'ere. And I all but

run into the car, which was turned towards London at a great pace, with so little light that I 'ardly saw it coming. But it was the car Hunt drives for certain and he was a guiding of it. To make more sure I went round to the garage, and let myself in with my key, and got on the top of my car to look over where he keeps his. And sure enough it was gone."

Barney reflected for a few seconds.

"I can't abide that fellow Hunt," he said then. "Yet he's a rough customer to deal with. First let's make sure whether Lady Elizabeth is at home or not."

"What are you going to do?" Timothy inquired nervously as his nephew made for the door.

"Ring up old Teresa, of course, and tell her I must see her mistress at once on important business."

"You 'ave a cheek," Mr. Lucas observed admiringly. "I wouldn't be in your shoes though, taking such a liberty."

Teresa the portress, when she at length appeared in response to repeated ringing, was far from encouraging.

The Lady Mother had gone to her room at half-past nine o'clock, she said, and she was not going to disturb her sleep for such a person as Barney Lucas.

"You are here in her service, ain't you?" the lad asked, putting his foot in the doorway as the indignant portress was about to shut him out. "What I have to tell Lady Elizabeth is of the greatest possible importance, and I will see her."

"The Lady Mother has had a great deal of worry to-day. She did not come home until late in the afternoon, and she could eat nothing

at supper. Sister Emily helped her when she retired to her room, and told me she was not to be disturbed before six to-morrow morning. So that if you wait, you may wait all night. But it won't be in here."

By a dexterous kick from her large foot in a felt slipper, Sister Teresa removed Barney's foot from the aperture of the door and slammed it in his face.

Alone in the courtyard, at eleven o'clock, under a drizzling rain, Barney was by no means daunted.

"Hanged if I won't wait till Hunt comes back and make him take the letter into the house for me," he decided. "I can force his hand if I catch him using the car without Lady E.'s knowledge. If he's really a toff come down in the world, he's sure to have relations or friends he can touch for a bit on occasion. Anyhow, I can't go back without getting something from somebody. If my boss comes home before I do, he won't dare to turn me off. Let him just try it, that's all."

Although he reflected thus and forced himself to believe he was in a position of independent mastery with regard to Torrens Hatherleigh, deep down in his mind Barney was not satisfied with their respective relations.

During the short space of time he had spent in the baronet's service Barney had been emphatically kept in his place. All that he had to do he was forced to do well. Torrens wasted very few words upon him, and those which he bestowed were simply what any fairly considerate master would give to a new servant.

"You have enough wages to buy yourself tobacco of the kind you are used to. My

cigars and cigarettes are not to be touched, and the liqueurs and spirits are for myself and my friends. Not for my servants."

Such was the sternly uttered dictate which had already been pronounced for the new valet's benefit. Barney resented it, and yet dared not be as insolent as he desired.

Manner meant a great deal, and Sir Torrens was a master of the tolerant but authoritative manner necessary to keep an attendant at a proper distance.

Barney admired him more each hour he spent under his roof; but he was beginning to be afraid of him.

He wanted Lady Elizabeth to pay him for spying on his master, and he felt sure, from his previous dealings with her, that he could prevail upon her to do so.

"Hunt shall work the business," he decided. "I'll slip into the garage, and nab him when he comes home, and find out who he's got with him. Who knows that I may not catch two birds with one stone, and get a bit from both, as well as from Lady Elizabeth when she sees the letter I've brought her?"

It needed a good deal of coaxing and bullying, and finally of bribing, before Timothy Lucas could be induced to part with the key of the garage.

Finally, it was agreed between uncle and nephew that the former should tell Hunt that Barney stole it while he was asleep. After which understanding, Barney set off with the key in his pocket, and after awakening his chauffeur to encourage him at his post near the front entrance, he made his way along the narrow lane which ran on one side of St. Ursula's garden to the garage

The stables at St. Ursula's were an after-thought added during the years in which it was successively used as a club, a boarding-house, a boys' school, and a private hotel. In all these capacities the place had been a financial failure. It was too large and too far from the centre of things, one of the few remaining great old-fashioned houses in London suburbs, which are bound to be destroyed in order to make room for rows of cheap and ugly shops and semi-detached "villas."

The stables, which were now used as a garage, were on the opposite side of the garden, and somewhat nearer to the front entrance of the house than the block of outbuildings from the roof of which Reine Hatherleigh had made her escape. They comprised four stalls from which two partitions had been removed, and a small coach-house, which was used by Hunt for the car in his care. A window in the coach-house wall overlooked the stalls, and by means of a short ladder Hunt was able to watch Timothy when at work cleaning his car. But there being no ladder on the other side, Timothy had found it necessary to clamber on to the car in order to see into the coach-house, and his nephew followed his example.

The glass of the window was clean. Hunt saw to that. Barney reflected that if it were open he would see and hear better, and Hunt would not be likely to notice it. The lad was divided in mind as to whether he had better wait in the garage, or by the little door in the wall of St. Ursula's garden, which he had noticed on more than one occasion, and connected in his own mind with the ghost story of the Grey Sister.

So far as he knew, this door was never used.

There was a nearer way to the garage close to the house by the tradesmen's entrance, which led into the kitchens; but Barney's instinct taught him that a lady "playing at ghosts" would probably steal back by the door which must be connected with the outbuildings and the "haunted" chapel.

For nearly an hour and a half he waited, seated comfortably in the car near the open door of the garage. By going to the entrance he could command a view of the site of the garden door, although in the darkness he could not distinguish it.

The air grew colder as the night advanced. Barney turned up his coat collar, shivered, and pushed the door to. Then, in the darkness he began to drowse and nod, the several "pick-me-ups" he had taken on his journey down having made him sleepy. He was fast asleep, and dreaming that the greatest wish of his heart had been attained, and the great ones of the earth were pouring riches at his feet while they implored him not to betray their misdeeds, when some sound close to him made him sit up suddenly, wide awake, and listening with all his ears.

A motor car was "purring" just outside the stable door. For a moment a spasm of fear caught at Barney's heart as he imagined that it was to be turned into the partition of the stable where he was hiding. But immediately afterwards he heard a key turned in the lock of the coach-house and the sound of the car being driven inside it.

In an instant he had vaulted on to the top of the car and was crouching by the open window. By the lamp in the motor he recognised Harry Hunt. Even in the feeble light the man

looked grimmer and more saturnine than usual, and as he lit an oil lamp on a table in the coach-house and extinguished the lights in the car, there was a slow deliberation in his movements which had something tragic about it.

"Looks as if he'd murder me if he caught me!" Barney whispered to himself. "And there I've been to sleep like a silly fool, and never seed who he's brought back with him!"

Barney was mistaken, as he discovered the next moment. Hunt approached the car again, and bent to speak to someone inside it.

"I've brought you in here to speak to you," he began in a low voice which trembled with strong emotion. "It is safer and more secret than out there in the road. You have been deceiving me, deceiving me for years. I might have guessed. But I never suspected you!"

There was deep reproach in his tones. The person in the car spoke not a word.

"What possesses you?" Hunt went on after a short pause. "How do you think it can end? Do, for the sake of your own self-respect, give up this stupid madness! I understood about the gambling. I thought it natural enough, though that ghost play-acting I've always found silly. You've been too much repressed, living that unnatural life, you had to break out now and again. And I've helped you. I'd do anything for you, as you know. Yet you have lied through thick and thin, even to me. Now I know, so it's useless to lie any more."

Still silence reigned within the car. Hunt opened the door and held out his hand.

"I don't want to keep you here all night," he said. "I am sorrier that I can say. But

understand : I help you no more in your plots and tricks. Unless you explain things fully to me, I'll follow up that man and shoot him within twenty-four hours !"

Someone was creeping slowly, with weary, nerveless movements, out of the car. Barney held his breath as he stared at a slight feminine form, shrouded in an enveloping wrap or shawl of black, which formed a hood over the bent head.

Harry Hunt crossed the coach-house to a locker, which he unfastened, and from which he drew a grey serge gown and veil.

"You are tired, I can see," he said, and there was a pitying note in his voice. "To-morrow you must answer my questions : to-night I will let you off. You need not touch that phosphorus. It is one o'clock, and no one will see you now that mischievous hoyden has gone."

Still no word from the shrouded figure. Only a deep, heartbroken sigh.

Then the slim frame slid from the black wrapping and stood revealed in the lamplight.

Barney's heart stood still.

He would have been ready to swear at first sight that he had never seen her before, this slender creature with diamonds on her bare white neck and in her shining red-gold hair. Her gown of white satin clung to her like a well-fitting glove, and emphasized the wasp-like smallness of her waist, and her long lace sleeves fell over tiny hands glittering with rings.

The face, pale as her gown, was delicate of feature and possessed a certain uncanny beauty, the dark eyebrows, heavy black eye-lashes, and vivid scarlet lips forming an odd contrast with the colourless skin and ruddy hair.

The woman's eyes were lowered. In a

listless, mechanical fashion Barney saw her draw off her rings and slip them into the front of her gown, fasten up her satin train, and roll up her lace sleeves, then throw over everything the shapeless grey gown on which a phosphorescent glow shone in the shadows, and draw over her head the all-concealing veil of the ghostly "Grey Sister."

Just at the last, before the veil covered her, she paused, and looking up at Hunt who stood watching her in silence, she seemed about to speak.

The words never came. With another sigh, she pulled the grey veil over her head and face. But Barney had caught the look in her wild, uplifted eyes. And Barney knew who she was.

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CHAPTER XIX

TORRENS PROVIDES FOR BARNEY

"You are late, Barney!"

Sir Torrens was standing with his back to the gas-fire in the dining-room of his flat at Folkestone Street, just as he had stood before the study fire at the Chase on the afternoon which was the last in the life of his cousin, John Hatherleigh.

That remembrance flashed into the mind of Barney as he saw him, handsome, well-groomed, and well-dressed as ever, courteous and kind in manner, ready, apparently, to do anyone a favour, and, beneath it all, capable of removing from his path by any means, however foul, any obstacle against his schemes.

Just for a second his good looks and his imperturbability became terrible to Barney. In the boy's mind words he had heard on the previous day from his mother echoed:

"You're on a dangerous path, Barney! Keep out of the way of a fair man who is your deadly enemy!"

He had laughed at Nanny's warning. Nevertheless, he had confided to her care that precious envelope he had stolen from Sir John's desk at the Chase, with instructions that she was to open it at once, "if anything happened to him," and to communicate with the police.

What could happen to him after that?

It was true that it was past twelve o'clock in

the morning, and that Torrens had returned to discover his absence, and would need an explanation. It was also true, and a cold shiver ran down Barney's back as he recalled the fact, that he and this "fair man," who his mother had said was his "deadly enemy," were alone in the house.

Madame Veronique, the fashionable dress-maker who rented the lower floors, never arrived with her assistants before nine o'clock, and it being now Saturday, Mr. Worthington, the tenant of the second floor, had as usual left on the previous evening for a Friday until Monday jaunt into the country, and shut up his bachelor flat.

Ellen Evans, the woman who came by the day, appeared at Folkestone Street punctually at eight o'clock every morning. For six hours, therefore, master and servant were shut in together.

"I'm a silly ass to get frightened," Barney told himself. "What can he do? I've only got to go to the window and yell, or blow the police whistle in the kitchen, if he was up to any tricks. And he won't dare to say much, seeing what I know."

He strove to assume an air of devil-may-care indifference as he returned his master's greeting.

He had reason, as he assured himself, to feel more independent than ever. For now he had gained what he called "a 'old" upon no less than three people.

In his pocket reposed a ten-pound note beside that ill-starred love-letter of Reine Hatherleigh, which had now been read by two persons on its way to the man for whom it was intended.

Barney had completed his Chiswick visit

with much adroitness. Before the two occupants of the coach-house had passed out, he had slipped down from his post of observation, and darted back to the lodge in front of the Retreat, and to the society of his Uncle Timothy, asleep before the fire.

The key of the stables was in its place, and only Barney was in evidence when Harry Hunt returned to the lodge for the night. In his morose and agitated condition, Hunt would have been glad of an excuse for falling upon the lad, whom he detested; but Barney disarmed him by pushing into his hand Reine's letter, which he had fastened in another envelope and addressed to Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh.

"You must take it to her, Mr. Hunt; I know she's gone to bed long ago and mustn't be disturbed—Teresa told me so more than an hour ago. But I waited for you to come home, as her ladyship must have this letter. I'm only carrying out her orders in bringing it to her."

Barney's action appeared justified. In less than half-an-hour Hunt returned from the house, and without a word placed in the boy's hands a letter containing a ten-pound note and the following words in Lady Elizabeth's writing:

"You have behaved cleverly and well, Barney, and I am grateful to you. We must save Miss Reine between us. Watch every movement of Sir Torrens, and write or telegraph me constantly. I will pay you well. E. H."

"She'll pay me well, and so will Mr. Hunt and his friend, the 'Grey Sister!'" the lad had told himself with a chuckle. "And Miss Reine ought to pay me, too, when she finds out what

I've been a-saving her from. I don't forget when people do me a good turn, and I've been her friend all along. As to Sir Torrens, in spite of his grand airs, I'll some day make him lie down and eat grass!"

Face to face with his master, however, with only the width of the dining-room table between them, it did not seem quite so simple a matter to make that gentleman "eat grass."

"Sorry I was detained, sir," Barney said, as nonchalantly as he could. "I didn't think you would be back so soon, so I went out and saw a friend."

"When you do that kind of thing, you must ask my permission."

Barney was silent for a few seconds. But the successes of the evening had lent him courage, and he resolved to "tackle" Torrens definitely on the spot.

"Sorry, sir," he said, "but I don't know as I'm suited to service."

"You are a very bad servant, certainly," the baronet remarked pleasantly, as he lit a cigarette.

"I was going to ask you if you thought you would be wanting me much longer, sir?"

"I don't really want you at all," Sir Torrens replied. "I took you out of kindness, as you seemed a bright, original little lad. Why? Are you thinking of bettering yourself, as you would put it?"

"I'm thinking of retiring from service, sir. Now and then I don't mind doing a bit of work for a friend, such as you, or Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, or Miss Reine."

"Oh! So we are your friends. We ought to feel grateful!"

"Why, yes, sir. People you take an interest

in, and that you know a lot about, too much, maybe, one may call friends, as I take it."

"So that is your definition of friendship?"

Sir Torrens said, as he drew an easy-chair to the fire and seated himself in it. "Do you know too much about the ladies you mention?"

"One can't know too much about Miss Reine. She's good right through," answered the lad.

"And the others are not, eh? I really feel flattered, though, to be put in the same list as the saintly Lady Elizabeth!"

"Praps she ain't so saintly as people think."

"What do you mean?"

Torrens turned in his seat and faced the boy, frowning.

Barney liked to air his omniscience; but he realized the danger of confidences with this man.

"I don't mean anything, leastways anything I'm going to tell," he said hastily. "Not about other people but you!"

"You are very kind! And what have you to tell me about myself?"

The brilliant blue eyes were fixed upon Barney with a hard intensity of stare.

"Well, sir, you've got an idea of marriage in your head. And excuse me for saying so, but you had better give it up."

"You are a wonderful lad, Barney, and I am exceedingly obliged for the interest you take in my affairs! Why am I not to be allowed to marry?"

"Not Miss Reine."

"Indeed! What is to prevent me?"

"I will! And so will Lady Elizabeth!"

Barney shot the words out boldly, and had the satisfaction of seeing his master's self-possession break down at last.

The colour left Torrens' face, his features twitched, and for a second or two he seemed incapable of finding words.

Barney himself was alarmed by the effect of his words and the long pause which followed them. Then Sir Torrens rose, yawned, and stretched his arms over his head in what seemed an access of sleepiness.

"Now that I know my future is in safe hands," he said, "arranged for me by you and Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, I can go to bed in peace. I think I will have a hot grog first, as it is chilly. Get it ready, Barney, and bring it to my dressing-room."

He went to the spirit-stand as he spoke, and opening it, took out a decanter.

"I think you are right, by the way," he said, standing with his back to Barney, who was by this time at the door. "You are not suitable for service. Very soon I may be going abroad, as I am not allowed to marry! So that I shall not want you any more after a few weeks' time."

"No, sir. But may I ask for the same little salary as I have now, just to keep me in mind of you? And so that I don't talk about you."

"My dear boy, you may talk about me as much as you like, once I am out of England. Fifty pounds a year is a lot of money, and I am anything but rich. But speak to me about it to-morrow morning, and I will see what I can do. You may take two glasses, if you like, and drink my health. You would only do it without my permission if I didn't give it."

He laughed as he spoke, and put the decanter of whisky on the table before leaving the room.

Barney went to the kitchen, feeling excited and ill at ease.

If Torrens left England, he realized that his power over him would be lost. In the same way, if he were ready to relinquish the idea of marrying Reine, Barney's "'old" would be weakened.

Torrens had not actually murdered Sir John, even though he had hastened and helped his death. As to the letters concerning his youthful forgeries, they were family matters, dating fifteen years back, and as Torrens had himself reminded his cousin, there was such a thing as a Statute of Limitations. Barney was cute enough to know that there were many men in the London sporting and "smart" world whose records were even worse than that of Torrens, and rested upon surer testimony than that of a dishonest stable-boy.

"I must make him pay up handsome before he puts the sea between us," he reflected as he prepared the grog. "Money down, and not so much a year, which I shouldn't get."

The kitchen was a small improvised one and opened into a pantry little larger than a cupboard. Barney prepared the hot water, lemon, and sugar, and went back into the dining-room for the whiskey. Torrens was an excellent judge, and Barney, who shared his Uncle Timothy's taste for alcohol, had more than once tried and appreciated this particular brand of Scotch, which the baronet kept under lock and key except during meal-times.

Barney was a strong wiry lad, but his evening's experiences had been tiring, and he felt, as he would have put it, the want of "a drop of something."

Before carrying in the decanter, therefore,

he lifted it to his lips, and poured a wine glassful of the raw liquor down his throat.

The strength of it made him gasp and splutter. Oddly enough too, it instantly made him feel drowsy, so that he could scarcely see to arrange the tray for Sir Torrens' room. He delayed over this so long that presently the baronet sauntered forth to see what had become of his servant.

He found Barney, with eyes half-closed, holding on to the back of a chair in the dining-room. On the table before him was the tray containing the whiskey, with a jug of hot water, sugar, lemon, and two glasses.

Sir Torrens appeared not to notice Barney's condition, and himself poured out two "stiff" allowances of grog, one of which he pushed towards Barney while he raised the other to his lips.

"Since we are going to part, my boy, you must drink my health, and I will drink yours."

His voice sounded a long way off to Barney, through whose muddled brain a suspicion of foul play was half-forming. But to see Torrens himself drink reassured him, and in the idea that another drop might "pull him together," Barney tossed off the steaming tumblerful, without noting that the brim of Sir Torrens' glass never touched his lips.

A moment later, as he staggered to put back the glass on the table, the wretched lad lurched forward and fell in a heap on the floor.

Torrens laughed.

He wiped his brow, nevertheless, and lifted the helpless form with obvious reluctance.

There was much to be done before the coming of Ellen Evans at eight.

First of all, there was Barney to carry to the

kitchen and place in a chair between the table and the gas-stove. The boy's face was over-spread with a dull red tinge and he was breathing heavily. Torrens was careful to place him in what seemed a natural position by the table, upon which he arranged the jug of hot water, the lemon, and a clean glass.

The spirit was the next accessory. Torrens emptied the remains of the whiskey down the sink, as well as the contents of his own glass, and washed them out, with the one Barney had used. Then he opened another bottle of whiskey, which he took from an oak wine-cupboard in the hall, and poured a portion of it into the decanter, and also into the glass by Barney's side on the table.

All this took some time, although Torrens moved with swiftness as well as with deliberation.

An examination of Barney's pockets was his next move, and the perusal of Reine's love-letter addressed to himself, and the note Lady Elizabeth had sent to Barney that evening, enclosing a ten pound note, and adjuring him to "watch Sir Torrens," and communicate with her constantly upon the subject of his movements.

Torrens frowned as he read the two women's letters, and then laughed again.

"I was only just in time," he murmured. "What a little cur it was!"

Leaving the limp, heavily-breathing figure hanging over the back of the chair in the kitchen, Torrens entered the boy's room, and overhauled his effects. Nothing was locked up or put away secretly. Barney had stolen various little objects belonging to his master with cynical frankness. Studs, a pencil-case,

cigarettes, gloves, a silver paper-knife, ties, etc., were merely slipped into a wooden box, the key of which was in the chest of drawers.

It was as though the lad had felt so sure of his hold on his master that he had not considered it worth his while to hide his larcenies.

Next, Sir Torrens visited his own room, changed his clothes, and packed his dress suit and a change of linen into a light portmanteau.

Then he glanced round to see if he had left anything about of particular value.

"People have a stupid trick of coming in with a light," he said to himself. "At the same time, I must not show too much caution."

By a little after three o'clock his arrangements were complete, and he saw with misgiving a faint clearing in the sky which heralded the dawn.

It was of vital importance that he should finish what he had in hand and get clear away unnoticed in the darkness.

Torrens placed his portmanteau in the hall, put on an overcoat, and going back to the kitchen, glanced for the last time in the direction of Barney.

The cunning, sharp-featured young face was relaxed in a drugged slumber.

"He brought it on himself!" Torrens said with a shoulder-shrug, as though he heard a voice accusing him.

Then he shut the door leading into the pantry, turned off the gas jet above the mantle-piece and the light in the gas fire beneath, and turned them on again full, without applying a match.

The smell of the rush of escaping gas was overpowering in the tiny room.

"It won't take long to settle the little reptile!" Torrens said as he shut the kitchen door, took up his umbrella, overcoat, and portmanteau which he had left in the hall, passed out of the flat and hurrying down the stairs, found himself outside in Folkestone Street at a quarter past three on a murky morning hung with fog.

His spirits rose at the thought that he had got rid of a blackmailing spy.

"There are early trains from Victoria to the city," he told himself, "and the city is as good a place as any other to keep quiet in for a few hours as a traveller at some hotel. I must get a taxi to the station."

No one seemed to be moving in Folkestone Street. Torrens congratulated himself on the fact as he turned into Piccadilly. Then, perceiving in the dim light a motor-car crawling along near the entrance to the street, he hailed it, and was about to jump in when the driver stopped him.

"This is not a public car; but I am ready to take you anywhere you want to go, Sir Torrens Hatherleigh," he said.

It was Harry Hunt, Lady Elizabeth's chauffeur.

Torrens realised that he had made a fatal mistake. But his coolness did not desert him.

"Thanks! But I wanted an ordinary taxi, Lord Nevil Wendover," he retorted, and raising his hat, crossed the road in the direction of a cab stand.

"Even if the worst came to the worst, he would not dare to give evidence against me!" Torrens told himself.

Yet he felt that the meeting was a bad omen.

CHAPTER XX

LADY ELIZABETH SPEAKS

FIVE days after the death of Barney Lucas, who was discovered by Sir Torrens Hatherleigh's charwoman asphyxiated in a kitchen full of escaped gas, Reine Hatherleigh drove up to the entrance of the flats in Clayton Street, and disregarding the lift, ran up to the first floor, eager to change her dress before anyone should notice that she had suddenly gone out of mourning.

It was unlikely that she would be remarked, as it was not yet ten o'clock, and her uncle and his wife were rarely visible before that hour in the morning.

There had been a good deal of friction in the household of late. "Het's" temper was of the explosive order, and she had taken a violent dislike against Reine because the girl declined to sit up late and lose her money at card-parties, and because she objected to the attentions of Major Wyndham and Messrs. Cohen and Klaptock.

"Teddy" Baring, too, who had been counted by Lady Newtown among her own particular "boys" had lost his heart to the tall, simply dressed girl of tastes as sporting as his own. Lady Newtown, who liked to reign alone, grew jealous and indignant with her husband because he took his niece's part.

"Reine's the right sort," Lord Newtown said.

"If you try to alter her, Het, you'll spoil her. She's a thorough sportswoman; but there's nothing fast or common about her."

Those words applied the match to the fire. "Het" flew at him in a whirlwind of fury, and wanted to know whether there was anything "fast or common" about her.

She loved to wrangle, not only when they were alone, but all over the flat, and she tried to drag Reine into her incessant discussions with her husband.

Miss Hatherleigh was doing her best not to dislike her uncle's wife heartily; but the task was getting beyond her. It was with a feeling of deep annoyance, therefore, that she ran into her that morning in the corridor as she was hurrying to her bedroom to change her dress.

Lady Newtown was wearing a dressing-gown of pale blue satin, profusely trimmed with lace, and her abundant hair, stiffly waved and arranged in a plait, hung down her back, tied with a blue ribbon.

She had evidently been lying in wait for Reine, for she pounced upon her, and embraced her affectionately.

"Darling!" she exclaimed, "wherever have you been so early in the morning? And in that smart white frock, too! I was half off my head with anxiety when they came and told me you weren't to be found. What's up, my dear?"

"I went for a walk," Reine said. "It is nothing for me to be out before eight, you know."

"So I said to your uncle. We shan't turn you into a London lady in a week or so. But he would think you'd made a bolt for it with that fellow Hatherleigh."

Reine's cheeks flamed with vexation. Without speaking, she began to move in the direction of her room.

"You know who's been in the drawing-room waiting for nearly an hour, I suppose?" Lady Newtown said. "Didn't the servants tell you?"

"No."

"Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh. My, but she is an odd-looking creature! I had a peep at her through my bedroom door being a bit open. Got up like an advertisement for a mourning warehouse. She looks like giving it you hot about something, so you'd better be prepared. Anyhow, you can tell her you are very happy and comfortable with us, can't you? And if you want someone to back you up and tackle her, I'll come in."

"Thank you. Will you please tell the servant to let her know I will join her almost immediately? I want to change my dress first."

"Quite right, my dear! She'd think it a bit odd for you to wear white within two months of your poor Pa's death. As for me, I consider it very right and sensible of you. Had I better slip on a black gown and go and have a chat with Lady Elizabeth to amuse her while she's waiting for you?"

"I won't be more than five minutes, and I don't think Lady Elizabeth minds being alone."

Lady Elizabeth, however, appeared to require amusement.

She had spent the three-quarters of an hour which had elapsed since her first arrival in flitting restlessly up and down the over-ornate drawing-room, now and then opening a book or newspaper and trying in vain to concentrate her attention on its contents, and again passing

her thin white fingers across the open keys of a piano.

The news of Reine's arrival came as a relief to her over-wrought nerves. Mechanically she sat down and softly touched the notes again. This time, almost without knowing it, she let them sound, and a strain of singular wild sweetness echoed through the flat.

Reine, when she had finished her toilet, paused outside the drawing-room. Dr. Osborne had spoken truly when he said that the girl was as fond of good music as he himself was. Miss Hatherleigh had no ability as a performer; but the skill and feeling of Lady Elizabeth's playing touched her profoundly. More than once at the Retreat she had listened outside the door, while, alone in her sanctum, Lady Elizabeth had evoked strains of majestic harmony from the organ. But never yet had her playing expressed more fully the anguish and unrest of a heart that is near to breaking.

Tears started to Reine's eyes.

What could it mean, she asked herself not for the first time, the despairing tenderness which this cold, self-contained woman was able to infuse into her playing.

Reine had heard her perform once at a charity concert in Chiswick; she had shown exquisite art on that occasion; but there had been nothing emotional about her playing, which at this moment, lightly as she pressed the keys, seemed the outcome of a tortured soul.

As the music ceased, Reine drew a deep breath and entered the room.

She had not met Major Hatherleigh's widow since she had quitted her roof. Lady Elizabeth turned on the music-stool to face her, but did

not rise to greet her, and let her small cold hand lie impassive within that of Reine.

The girl was struck for the first time by the fact that the Lady Mother of St. Ursula's was old, middle-aged only in years at forty-three, but worn into premature old age.

She was so small and slight, so full of restless energy and of a certain distinguished grace, that the idea of her years did not as a rule present itself. But this morning the colourless face showed itself to be full of fine wrinkles, and the intent dark eyes looked haggard and weary, as though from nights of anxious wakefulness.

"I have come to speak to you about Torrens Hatherleigh."

Reine bent her head, and drew a chair towards the music stool. She was trembling so much that she felt she, too, must sit down.

Before, however, she had done so, Lady Elizabeth sprang up.

"Are we likely to be disturbed here?" she inquired. "My talk with you must be private."

"Will you come to my room? Someone might come in here at any moment."

Reine led the way to her bedroom. The wisdom of the proceeding was shown by a scuffle in the hall as the drawing-room door was opened, and a vision of blue satin disappearing within Lady Newtown's room.

"No one will disturb us," Reine said as she locked her bedroom door and offered her visitor a chair. "And if we speak low, it will be difficult to overhear us, as there is the dressing-room between us and the corridor."

This was the last day Reine was fated to spend in the flat at Clayton Mansions. All

her life she could recall every detail of that scene, and just the point in her bedroom window through which the dreary brick back walls of London houses showed above the ground glass.

The kitchens of various flats of a less sumptuous kind than those in Clayton Street were visible to Reine as she sat facing Lady Elizabeth, whose back was to the light.

The girl knew that some great emotional experience was before her, and the haunting grief which had marked Lady Elizabeth's playing still sounded in her ears. Reine had never before felt so elated, so highly strung, or so defiant. She meant to let her visitor speak, to listen with all the patience she could muster to the usual abuse of Torrens. Then it would be her turn; and the words were already in her heart and almost on her lips by which she would declare her independence, her love for Torrens, and her resolve to stand by him through everything.

So she waited, longing for her chance to come, and while Lady Elizabeth sat silent, apparently in doubt as to how to begin, she watched the movements of the servants as they busied themselves with the breakfast things in the kitchens of the flats opposite her window.

"You have been meeting Sir Torrens this morning," Lady Elizabeth began at last.

"I see him when I like. I gave no promise on the subject."

"Are you mad, that you won't take warning? Had you no respect for your father? What did he tell you about his cousin?"

"He had a reason for hating him because he was the heir, and would dispossess me."

"And I? What reason have I for all I have said to you about the man?"

"Torrens said—" Reine began, and then checked herself, blushing deeply.

"Go on! I insist upon hearing what explanation he gave."

Lady Elizabeth's tones were quick and agitated. For the first time in her acquaintance with her, Reine saw a faint colour creep over her thin cheeks.

"Torrens said that you were nasty to him because years ago in India your husband and he both admired some lady. Major Hatherleigh quarrelled with him about it, and there was a lot of talk, and Torrens left India, and Major Hatherleigh went off on that expedition and never came back, and you always would think the whole thing was Torrens' fault."

"He told you that?"

"Yes."

"That my husband and he quarrelled over some woman they both admired?"

"Yes. And so did Mrs. Willie Devereux."

"Do you mean Dot Devereux, Colonel Devereux's widow?"

"Yes. She—well, please don't be angry, but since you say such things to me, I must tell you—she made out that you could not have cared so very much, after all."

"That I could not have cared!"

Lady Elizabeth spoke the words very slowly, and kept silent for some minutes afterwards.

Reine went on watching the domestic operations in the flats, with mutinous chin and upraised face. She did not heed what she saw, but she dared not look at that tragic face in front of her. Her heart was beating

so loudly she almost feared her companion would hear it. She knew that some announcement was coming which might hurt her terribly. But she kept on repeating to herself: "I will be true to Torrens all the same! I will not let anyone turn me against him!"

"Would you like to hear your father's reasons and mine for forbidding you to know his cousin?"

Lady Elizabeth's voice was unnaturally quiet. Reine had to clear her throat and moisten her lips before she answered.

"If you wish, by all means!"

"Torrens Hatherleigh lost his parents early. He was born to debts, brought up extravagantly, over-petted, neglected. Your grandmother spoilt him. At twenty-two he forged her name, not knowing that she was dead. Before then, he had robbed her as he had robbed others. For the honour of the family the thing was kept secret."

The rose tints faded from Reine's cheeks. But she tried to speak bravely.

"That was all a long time ago. My father never told me a word about it. And are there any proofs?"

"The proofs were until last Saturday in the possession of Barney Lucas, your father's groom."

"But he was in Torrens' service," Reine cried, "and he died last week at his flat. Didn't you hear of it?"

"I heard of it this morning, when I read about the inquest in the newspaper. I had employed the lad to report his master's movements to me, in your interests."

"In mine?"

"That I might be sure that you did not fall into the power of Torrens Hatherleigh."

"Do you mean that you paid Barney to spy on his master?"

"Yes. These are the telegrams I have received each day this week, signed in his name."

She pushed a bundle of telegraph forms into the hands of Reine, who, bewildered and troubled, read them aloud without understanding them.

"T. H. quiet. Went to City on business. Lunched at Club. Did not meet R."

"No news to-day."

"T. H. gone to Races, Lingfield."

"T. H. motored to Richmond with friends."

"T. H. at Skating Rink. Goes to-night Covent Garden Ball. No communication with R. H."

Reine gave her back the messages.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"Barney got tipsy and left the gas on so that he was suffocated, while Sir Torrens was out last Friday night. How could he send you telegrams?"

"Sir Torrens is an adept at signing for dead people," Lady Elizabeth explained bitterly.

"That is what he did when he forged the name of his aunt Eva, your grandmother."

"Do you mean that he sent you these?"

"Who else could have done it?"

Reine got up suddenly.

The room seemed to be swimming round her.

Forger, thief, liar!

Was he all these? And was there anything yet worse she had to hear?

"I can't say anything to all this!" she broke out at last. "I think it would have been better

to tell me before. Besides, I have only heard one side of it. I must see him, and ask him if he can explain—"

"You must never see him again! Can you not understand, you foolish child, that your money attracts this thief and gambler, this man who lives by trading on the love of women whose lives he ruins?"

"I can't and won't listen to any more!" Reine cried out desperately. "Even if Torrens has done wrong and wicked things years ago, he isn't very old, and surely there must be some hope for him yet! I believe there is! And—I love him and won't give him up!"

She stared in flushed defiance down into Lady Elizabeth's face, looking like nothing but a beautiful, overgrown school-girl. First love lent extra brilliance to her clear blue eyes; but the child nature was still there. So far, none of a woman's deepest feelings had been aroused. For the last time Reine Hatherleigh looked out on life with the joyous hopefulness of early girlhood.

Her companion seemed to feel this. Suddenly her face softened, and something like pity shone in her eyes.

"Reine," she said, "I have told you why your father disliked Torrens. Now I will tell you why I will not let you have anything to do with him. Sit down and do not interrupt me. Remember: all that I say I can prove."

CHAPTER XXI

"TORRENS HATHERLEIGH'S WIFE

"NINE years ago in India I had a friend so intimate that we were like sisters. She was about my age. Her husband was a silent, morose man; but I think he loved her better than anyone suspected.

"She was a woman you would not be capable of understanding: complex, half-good and half-bad, anxious to do right, but with a craze for excitement of which she herself was afraid.

"She respected her husband, to whom she had been married ten years; but his reserve chilled her. She, too, learned to hide her feelings, and so earned the name for having none among the free and easy military society.

"She was attractive in a way. Torrens Hatherleigh thought so at least, and set himself to work to break down her coldness, and to bring out the worst of which she was capable, the violent feelings, the mad love of excitement—"

Lady Elizabeth paused abruptly, and passed her handkerchief over her face, which had become moist with agitation.

"This woman fought against his influence," she went on presently in low, vehement tones. "He had a bad name, even among men. Her husband detested him, and insulted him on every possible occasion. I watched the terrible struggle which went on in her heart. For she was not bad, as he would have made her, or

heartless or cruel. But something in him, some insidious charm he has, so worked upon her that although she strove to resist him, she came to think of no one else, night and day.

"The end came suddenly.

"Talk, lies, scandal : untrue stories brought to her husband's ears by officious friends. He had no real cause for jealousy ; but he was one of the most jealous men alive. He watched his wife, and one unlucky afternoon, creeping in unexpectedly, he found her at tea with Torrens Hatherleigh, and saw him catch her in his arms and kiss her.

"That was all. A flirtation, such as many officers' wives amuse themselves with. But her husband would listen to nothing. He fired at Torrens, and when she, fearing lest he might commit murder, rushed between, he turned his fury on her."

"But it was her fault!" protested Reine. "She was married, and she ought to have kept Torrens or anyone else at a proper distance."

"You are too young to judge or understand. What do you know of a woman's nature or of a man's?" Lady Elizabeth asked harshly. "This one scene broke up her life. Her husband took his story to the Colonel, and Torrens had to leave the regiment. Her husband only saw her once again, and died away from her. Yet she was innocent—"

"You pity her because she was your friend," Reine broke in. "It was very wrong of Torrens to flirt with a married woman, of course. But you say they all do out there, and he told me something about all this. Since you say it was such a long time ago, he can't have been very old. Perhaps, as you say she had been married ten years, she was older than he—"

"You will not listen or understand when it is a question of Torrens Hatherleigh! What will you say when I tell you that it was in a scuffle with him over those cheques he forged that your father lost his life?"

"I will not believe it! Who told such a story? My father is dead, and Torrens—"

"Barney Lucas was in the study, hidden behind a curtain, all the time. He tried to work upon that knowledge to blackmail Torrens."

Reine was silent for a few seconds. Then she loyally took up her protests again.

"Barney is dead, so that he can't deny it," she said, "But he was dishonest and untruthful. He may have told you all that to curry favour with you. I will not believe a word of it!"

"Reine, after all that I have told you, do you mean to marry Torrens Hatherleigh?"

"I will marry him if I marry any man, in spite of what you or anyone can say against him!" the girl answered proudly.

"Then there is only one thing left for me to do. Read this!"

Reine took the long slip of paper defiantly, and read it.

Then a mist seemed to gather before her eyes. She rubbed them to make sure she was not dreaming. It was not, it could not be true!

She had already thought of Dot Devereux, and connected her with that flirtation story. But it was not Dot Devereux's name she saw written there.

A marriage certificate, dated eight years before, at a registry office in Southampton, was in her hands. And the names inscribed

were those of Captain Torrens Hatherleigh, bachelor, aged twenty-eight, and Elizabeth Hatherleigh, widow, aged thirty-five.

Reine never knew how the paper left her hands. She was not conscious of having given it back; she was conscious of nothing but stupefaction.

The secret she had learned appeared to her incredible, even grotesque.

That Lady Elizabeth, that paragon of saintliness, wrapped in a life-long grief for an adored husband, and indifferent, even hostile to all living men, should be all the while legally the wife of a heartless scoundrel she denounced to everyone, appeared so amazing that Reine's brain could not grasp it.

Yet the paper seemed genuine; she had actually held it in her hands. No cross-questioning on the subject was possible, even had Reine been inclined to attempt it. For somehow, before she had recovered from the shock, Lady Elizabeth had left the room.

But for the accident of seeing an account of the inquest on Barney Lucas in the newspaper, in all probability Lady Elizabeth would not have come.

Reine realised this, and shuddered.

She had been through too much that morning, too much happiness, too much excitement, and too complete a disillusion.

"I can't understand! I can't understand!" she kept on murmuring to herself.

These people, with their frantic loves and hates, their gambling, their jealousy, their secrets and their lies, were beyond her comprehension.

Reine's life had been so simple—a clean outdoor existence apart from passions and

complications—that she had no experience to guide her in paths as intricate as these.

She was bitterly sorry and humiliated to think of her credulousness, which had made her so easy a dupe for Torrens.

"But why, why did he do it?" she asked herself, "Why did he pester me to marry him? He might have known at any moment I might find this out. Yet we were to leave England after a secret marriage—"

She paused. A burning blush crept over her cheeks. Unfastening the collar of her dress, she drew up a long gold chain of her mother's she was wearing, and withdrew from it a new gold wedding ring.

She could not bear even to look at it and recall the feeling of elation and tenderness which had swept over her when it was placed on her finger. Crossing to the window, she opened it quickly, and flung out the ring.

Some children from an adjoining mews were playing there. She had heard their voices. The ring could become a street child's toy. To Reine it was nothing but a symbol of her own blind folly.

Yet her heart ached miserably.

"It was all pretence, then, that he loved me! Not that his love would be worth having! Why, if he be married, is it kept a secret? Why was I not told from the beginning? They pretended they hardly knew each other. And they never met, for no one saw him about the Retreat. And she certainly never went to see him. Why isn't she angry when she hears how he goes to gambling clubs with a red-haired woman whom people say was his wife? Unless—"

A blinding light seemed to make things for a moment clear.

Reine put up both hands to her head.

"It can't be!" she exclaimed.

Yet, after what she had already heard, nothing seemed impossible.

How if the colourless Lady Mother, with her pale eyelashes, paler eyebrows, and hidden hair could be transformed on occasion into a red-haired syren, intent on risking her money at gambling tables in the society of Torrens Hatherleigh?

"Yet how could she get away? How could she slip out to join him without anyone at the Retreat guessing about it? Dot Devereux said Lady Elizabeth used to gamble, and Esther said Torrens' man told her he went to gambling clubs with a red-haired lady. Of course I don't know whether she has red hair. Somehow, I never suspected her of having any hair at all! I suppose I took it that she had had her head shaved and wore sackcloth. Anyhow, she can't have gone out to suppers and clubs in that mourning get-up. So she must have slipped out from the Retreat on the sly.

"I feel certain that dark chauffeur was in the secret.

"She must have—"

The solution flashed across her and the mystery of the "Grey Sister" was solved.

"What an idiot I was not to suspect! I heard the motor stop outside the garden wall on the night when I ran away. And it must have been she I caught escaping, got up like a ghost—"

Reine looked down at her hand. A faint blue mark still showed the trace of savage teeth upon it.

She staggered to a seat, feeling physically sick.

She felt she hated the mad world she was in, the cruelty of it, the secrecy, and the wickedness.

Although she had not liked Lady Elizabeth and had rebelled against her, Reine had believed her to be benevolent and good, and Torrens, in spite of her judgment, she had grown to love.

Even now she could not bear to think of him!

She sprang up, locked the door, and flinging herself on her bed, burst into an agony of tears.

"If it were all only an ugly dream and I could be home again!" she sobbed.

Someone was tapping at her bedroom door. Presently she heard Lady Newtown's voice,

"Open the door, darling! Here's a letter for you, and I want to talk to you!"

"I'm sorry, Het. But I can't see anyone just now. I'm not up to it. Do you mind slipping the letter under the door?"

Muttering something uncomplimentary over the rebuff given to her curiosity, Lady Newtown pushed in the letter and retired.

Listlessly Reine took it up. The postmark of Merehampton brought homesick tears to her eyes.

At least there would be her old home to go back to now. That had been part of the bargain. She would never willingly see Torrens Hatherleigh again; but at least he must be held to his promise to let her buy back the Chase and live there.

"I don't want ever to have anything to do with men again," Reine told herself. "Later on I don't mind meeting Bob Osborne, because

I think he really is a friend, although I am afraid to believe much in anybody now! Just at present I should be ashamed to face him, and would rather keep out of the way of everybody. But if I can live quietly at the Chase a few years, things will right themselves a little and I shall forget.

"It seems impossible to hope for now; but forgetfulness must come some day.

"Just to feel the wind of Dartmoor on my face, and to ride there alone will bring me back to my senses. I feel that if I lived among these people any longer I should go mad!"

All this time the letter with the Merehampton postmark lay in her lap. The irregular writing seemed familiar to her; but until she opened it she did not associate it with Esther Yeo, whose name she found signed at the end.

"Dear Madam," the letter began,

"Seeing as how you did not want my servises and being tired of London I have come home and am staying with my uncle Mr. Bennett the tailor in High Street. I have not herd of your marriage so suppose it is off. It does not do to put fathe in men. If I was to beleeeve all as is said to me by them I do not know weer I should be. All Merehampton is talking about the sale of the Chase and all manner of questions is axed me. I thought you was going to marry Sir Torrens and be my lady and kepe the old home. It do seem a pity to let it go out of the family. It were sold yesterday by wot they call private treety to an American gentleman as was shown me in the town. Twenty thousand he paid money down and Sir Torrens came down himself to take the money but left for London same day. He would not have got mooch of a welcom in Merehampton. I suppose I shall not see you here again dear Miss, as I think I may be married shortly to a Tavistock gentleman. But kepe a good heart. Although you have lost a home and a husband you may happen on others. I am told poor Barney as was so mad

about me killed hisself for love of me. You may be thankful in your prayers men do not doo such foolish things for you.

Yours respectfully
Esther Yeo."

The letter had been posted on Wednesday morning. Reine remembered that on the previous day Torrens had informed her he had to run down to the Chase "on business." That business was to receive the money for the sale of the estate while all the time he was planning with Reine their happy return home after a honeymoon spent in Egypt.

He had fascinated her strongly. She had been without a doubt very much in love with him, with a girl's first love, whole-hearted and devoted.

She was miserably distressed and bewildered by all she had learned, and not sufficiently mistress of herself as yet to feel pity for Lady Elizabeth or relief at her own escape.

But the trick Torrens had played in inducing her to marry him secretly at a City church that morning, with the money for the sale of her old home actually in his pocket, brought the man's callousness and perfidy before Reine far more vividly than all Lady Elizabeth's words had done.

"He must be utterly worthless!" the girl cried with an out-break of passionate tears. "And as mad as he is wicked. A man as bad as that can't be in his right senses. How he must have laughed at me. Lady Elizabeth was right; he could only have wanted to get at my money before I found out any of these things. Thank Heaven I am free and need never meet him again!"

A tapping at the door heralded another

visit from Lady Newtown, this time with a telegram. And again, to her disgust, she was requested to push the message under the door.

Reine tore it open with trembling fingers, convinced beforehand that it contained "more bad news."

"Courage, darling," the telegram ran. "Just learned of crazy visit paid you. Must not believe Lady E.'s extraordinary lies. You are my wife in absolute legality. Will explain everything when we meet. I shall be waiting for you at Waterloo as arranged at six fifteen. Your devoted husband, Torrens Hatherleigh."

CHAPTER XXII

BROUGHT TO BOOK

At the moment when Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh descended from Lord Newtown's flat in Clayton Street after her interview with Reine, the man who had been the subject of their talk, Torrens Hatherleigh, was engaged in packing his things at his chambers in Folkestone Street, Piccadilly.

For the moment, owing to the death of Barney, he was without a man-servant. He was not in the habit of waiting on himself, and had called in Ellen Evans to assist him. He did not wish to have his movements known to many people at the present juncture, and desired to leave his rooms as speedily as possible, now that an account of the inquest on Barney had appeared in the newspapers.

"Reine can do without a maid until we get to Marseilles," he reflected, "and I without a man. They are often more bother than they are worth, travelling. Besides, the quieter we are the better. It was a bore having to give evidence at the inquest, but it is an immense relief not to be bothered with that little worm Barney any more."

He had not cared to sleep at Folkestone Street since Barney's "accident," and had retained a bedroom at the City hotel to which he had betaken himself in the early hours of the Saturday morning. But there were certain

final arrangements he wished to make at the Folkestone Street flat before leaving England, and these he had almost completed with Ellen's help by half-past eleven o'clock.

Torrens was in high good humour. He passed from the bedroom to the dressing- and dining- rooms with his hands in his pockets, humming a tune, in the intervals of giving directions to Ellen, who was busy dusting and packing some ivories which he meant to send with other artistic treasures to a bank, before letting his flat, furnished, to a club acquaintance.

Securing a tenant was another piece of luck, just as the private sale of the Chase and the winning of Reine had been.

"Five guineas a week for the flat, while the rent unfurnished is only two and a half, twenty thousand down for that old barn, the Chase, and a lovely wife with five thousand a year," he told himself. "And all within a week. Getting rid of Barney so quietly was luck, too, though I didn't like the business and meeting Nevil Wendover in Piccadilly was a facer. I have made such a point of keeping out of the fellow's way that I had no idea he knew me.

"I wonder why she hasn't written to me since Saturday?

"It is a relief, anyhow, and if the poor creature thinks to starve me out and force me to apply to her for more money, she never made a greater mistake.

"She has always sworn that Nevil suspected nothing. I can't think why she wanted to have the fellow always about. Women are like that: so clever in some ways and so silly in others.

"Reine ought to be a charming companion. She is so handsome, and so fond of me, and so

fresh and original. I feel glad I have never done Egypt; it will be worth doing with her.

"I suppose she will make no end of a row when she learns about the sale of the Chase. As we leave to-night, she isn't likely to have any news about it first. When she does, I shall be able to talk her round, and say it was the blunder of my agent, and that I knew nothing about it.

"Besides, by that time the child will be too much in love with me to care where she is if I am there!

"It will be a deliciously new sensation, after all, to marry a beautiful girl who knows nothing of the world, and teach her everything. It is the greatest mistake to be with people older than oneself, or not so fit, or so high-spirited.

"I am nearly thirty-seven; but this girl will take ten years off my age with her freshness.

"There's no tameness about her either. She's a young tartar when roused. I shall have to get her into a rage now and then for the fun of the thing!

"How handsome she looked that day when I caught her at the hunt and chased her, and how she glared at me with her big blue eyes, and struck at me with her hunting crop!

"I should have been a dead man in that infernal bog but for her.

"Well, I mean to make her very happy, and if I hadn't come along, she might have fallen a prey to that sobersides of a grey-headed country doctor, or perhaps to one of those Jewish bounder friends of her music-hall aunt.

"We will have a rare time together, tomboy Reine and I, in Cairo and the Desert, or perhaps Morocco and Tunis. I don't want to see England again within ten years.

"No more begging for money, no more dodging creditors, no more secret ways!

"Money of my own, and a beautiful young wife with more, and no longer any half-crazy, middle-aged fanatic to carney to and keep in good humour! That page of my life is turned down for ever!

"I must write to Betty from abroad to make her understand it is of no use to follow me up or spy upon me. The poor soul has been devoted to me; but she will have compensations.

"It couldn't go on, and I am jolly glad to be out of it, and shall take good care to keep out of her way for the rest of my life."

The electric bell rang.

Torrens was expecting various small purchases for his journey, and told Ellen to answer it at once.

"But if anyone should want to see me say I am out. I can't be bothered with people this morning."

The woman remained away so long that Torrens opened the door to listen. He had scarcely done so when someone who had been holding Ellen in talk by the entrance darted across the hall, pushed open the dining-room door, shut it, and faced him, leaning her back against it.

Dark eyes fiercely distended, miserable and despairing, stared at him from the ashen-white face of Elizabeth Hatherleigh.

Torrens fell back a step, astounded and unnerved, while his visitor, glancing round the room, took in the preparations for an immediate departure.

"You are going away!" she said, with dry lips. "You did not mean to let me know!"

He wondered greatly how much she had found out, and framed his speech to discover it.

"I feel awfully run down over that business of Barney," he began, "and thought a few days in the country would do me good—"

"But you are packing the furniture."

"Only a few ornaments. I have had the good luck to let the flat for a year. I don't much like to stay in it after that sad affair of the boy's death."

"You brought that about! My brother Nevil saw you leave the flat at three o'clock on Saturday morning."

"I suppose you had set him on to watch me just as you paid Barney to spy on me?"

"Nevil did not even know you by sight until quite lately. He first found out your address by following Barney here. I had nothing to do with it, Torrens."

Even in her state of resentful excitement, she uttered his name as no other woman had ever spoken it, with a caressing accent, as though it were dear to her.

The man before her was far past being touched by her affection. He owed her too much to care for her, even had youth and beauty still been hers to attract his fickle notice.

Usually he saw her in disguise, artificially beautified, splendidly dressed, and showing the full pride of her one great attraction, the splendid red-gold hair which owed very little to dye. But this morning he beheld her as she really was at close quarters, as he had seldom done during the past few years, a woman seven years his senior, who looked older yet by reason of the suffering and sorrow stamped upon her emaciated face.

The saintly, abstracted calm she had worn

so long and successfully in public was gone. She was, as a critic had unkindly suggested, a "great actress," but to-day she was not acting.

In her hollow dark eyes hungry love strove with stormy indignation. She knew this man to be her bad genius, knew that he had poisoned her life, destroyed her happiness, distorted her nature, forced her even to be a cheat and a thief in order to supply his extravagances. All that she could forgive, as she could overlook the fact that he was almost a murderer in the case of his cousin, and wholly one over the death of Barney Lucas.

What she could not pardon was the fact that, knowing the life of sacrifice and of fraud she led for his sake, he could forget her generosity, her years of passionate devotion, to make secret love to a "raw girl" such as Reine Hatherleigh.

"My dear Betty," Torrens said, striving hard to speak unconcernedly under the magnetism which this woman of strong will and stronger feelings exercised upon him, "I have always told you, you made a mistake in having any member of your—well, your very extraordinary family about you. Of course it must have been hard for a man of your brother's position to 'do time' over that necklace affair. But crime is getting popular among the upper classes, and he would have lived it down. You might have helped him without having him always about you. He was bound in time to find out too much. Naturally he will keep quiet for his own sake. What did you tell him?"

"I told him this morning that you were my husband."

Torrens flushed deeply.

"What stupid folly!" he exclaimed.

"Had I not done so, he would have denounced you after reading about the inquest on Barney."

"Scarcely wise for him to come forward in anything of the sort—a discharged gaol-bird and your brother!"

"He loves me, Torrens, and cannot forgive you or anyone for making me wretched. But I have made him swear to keep silent."

Torrens fidgetted uncomfortably about the room, and began lighting a cigarette with shaking fingers.

He was longing to get rid of this woman, out of his rooms and out of his life altogether. Yet he had just sufficient humanity not to care to meet the gaze of her yearning eyes.

She was quite an old woman now, he told himself. He had so seldom seen her in her Lady Mother garb, only on one or two occasions in London society, that he had forgotten how pallid and pinched her face was, and how colourless, with those whitish eye-lashes and feebly-marked eyebrows.

How different to his blooming red and white-cheeked Reine, with her athletic proportions, and dark-blue eyes flashing girlish fun under curled black lashes!

Nevertheless, for every reason it was important to keep Lady Elizabeth in a good temper until he could persuade her to go.

"Forgive me for being such a discourteous brute as not to give you a chair," he said, bringing one forward. "But you took my breath away by the unexpectedness of your visit. Was it wise, do you think, being so well known as you are, to come here at this time in the day in that dress?"

"It is natural enough for a wife to come and

see her husband," she returned coldly as she took the chair he offered.

"You seem to forget our contract to keep that—that unlucky marriage affair a secret!"

"Have I not kept to the contract?" she asked in low, sharp tones. "Have I not kept it secret, and worked and slaved day and night, against my conscience, against my soul, to gain enough money to support you as well as my charities? And how was it to end? That, in time, when enough money was forthcoming, we were to go away together somewhere, a long way off, to live our lives quietly. That is why I have come to-day, to ask you whether that time has come?"

She sat with her back to the light, and with her eyes fixed intently upon the man.

Try as he would to command his feelings, she could read dismay and annoyance in his face, and the sight cut her to the heart.

She had done so much for him, risked so much, and for so long; surely he could not be going to desert her now?

In any case, she told herself with a tightening of her lips, he could not do without her. She held him by too sure a tie.

"You do not speak," she said quietly, "Is that why you are preparing to travel?"

"Why, no, Betty, of course it isn't. This is merely a short trip to Brighton as a rest for the nerves. I haven't been able to sleep lately, saw a doctor this morning, in fact—"

"Was it before or after you met Reine Hatherleigh?"

"Reine Hatherleigh?" he stammered. "Why—what do you mean?"

"I have just come from her."

"You have seen Reine?"

"Yes, it was necessary in her own interests. The game was going too far, Torrens. You had actually dared to speak to her of marriage!"

"Well?"

"I called to tell her the truth,"

Torrens' colour paled. Muttering something under his breath, he came towards her, frowning. Very rarely had she seen him thus. It was the same face, convulsed with fury, he had shown to Sir John Hatherleigh in his study.

"What did you tell her?" he asked roughly.

"That you were my husband," the woman replied, meeting him boldly eye to eye. "I showed her the certificate of our marriage."

"You told her a lie and you showed her waste paper. At the time of that Southampton farce my cousin Ronald was alive. He did not die for more than a year afterwards. I have proofs of it, dated letters. You are nothing to me, nothing; do you understand? I have put up with this pretence for years, for your sake, because you were so crazy about me. But it is over now, and I have had about enough of it. Reine Hatherleigh is my wife: I married her this morning. To-night we leave England together. Now you can do just as you like! I don't say I am not sorry for you; but I don't want to have anything more to do with you or ever to see you again!"

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO INJURED WOMEN

"I DON'T want to have anything to do with you or ever to see you again!"

Those words and nothing else Elizabeth Hatherleigh heard.

So long as she lived they would ring in her ears as the death-knell of a romance of nine years, sad and sordid in some ways, but to her the one in life for which she staked her soul.

She was too clever not to have suspected before this that Torrens wanted to be free, that the chain, easily as it hung, galled him at times. Yet she had made very little claim upon him: only to see him as often as possible when they were both in London, and to hear from him, if it were only a few words, every week.

Almost all pretence at love-making on his part was over. But for three years they had constantly met in secret to indulge in the amusement dear to them both, of gambling. Even that she would have given up for his sake, but that it was a tie to bind them together.

So long as she had been inaccessible to him, and had held him off in stern faithfulness to a husband whom she respected, Torrens had been in his way madly in love with his cousin's beautiful and distinguished wife. But once he had won her heart and forced from her the avowal that she loved him, he cared a little less, and after their secret marriage, following

on Ronald Hatherleigh's disappearance, his passion very soon evaporated.

At the time of the ceremony he knew that his cousin still lived, though desperately wounded, by a letter he had received from a comrade. As the marriage was not legal, he was ready enough to agree to it, being still in love with Lady Elizabeth. Secrecy was essential. Colonel Devereux knew of the cause of the quarrel between the two Hatherleighs, and a serious scandal would have been started had it become known that Major Hatherleigh's widow had left for England and married his cousin as soon as she received news of her husband's death.

Thus the tragic story had begun, the wretched life of deception by the woman and idle extravagance at her expense by the man.

There was so much good in Elizabeth's character to set against her passionate nature and her craze for excitement, that in the right hands she might have proved a woman of noble benevolence.

But Roland Hatherleigh, whom she had married to escape the disgrace and shame of her brothers' and her sister's conduct, was a man of taciturn ways, devoted to his wife and his profession, but narrow-minded, jealous, and surly.

He had been totally outside the real existence and the real mind of the brilliant, emotional creature he had married, who possessed an infinitely keener intelligence than he, leavened by a streak of the "Wendover wildness."

From the first Torrens' high spirits and fascination had been almost irresistible to her. Partly out of spite against his cousin who detested him, Torrens set himself to win her

from him; and although he could not succeed in making her forget her duty, he encouraged her tastes for betting and gambling, and slipped into a position of familiar confidence with her.

Lady Elizabeth sat there now in his rooms, her thin hands clasped in her lap, her eyes staring before her, and saw it all, as a drowning man beholds in his last moments the phantasmagoria of his life.

In one way she had gone into it with open eyes. She had known that the man was unprincipled and immoral, and had loved him nevertheless, "mothering" him in her mind with excuses for his vices.

"He is like a splendid, healthy child, or a strong young animal, unable to exercise any moral sense," she would tell herself. "He means a thing when he says it. It is not his fault if he does not mean it long. He loves me in his way: he must love me, as I am necessary to the existence he likes best. Wrong-doing does not hurt him as it hurts me. He is incapable of remorse, and almost perhaps for that reason incapable of sin. For if the sin leave no trace and be but the carrying out of a momentary impulse, how can it be harshly judged? The keener the conscience, the greater the evil in offending against it. I sin in lying, in giving charitable donations to my husband instead of to the poor, and in gambling to work off the craze I have for excitement. Yet Heaven knows I suffer!

"I work from early dawn: I pray incessantly, though I feel I am not worthy to be heard: I spend my whole time in trying to raise to a calmer and better state weak and wicked natures, women who have suffered or have been dragged down by the cruelty of men.

"In spite of all the praise I receive and the sort of worship in which they hold me, the sense of evil never leaves me : I feel I sin and I suffer.

"But he—his conscience is clear as that of a child, which kills in wantonness and cannot understand remorse."

Thus she had always reasoned, excusing him, and even excusing herself for loving him, and longing for the time when they might be "quietly happy" together "somewhere a long way off."

That hope was now dispelled. She could deceive herself no longer. The man had grown tired of her, and had told her so brutally. More : he had left her there alone, with no pretence at courteous leave-taking, and the avowed intention of never seeing her again.

"I am not even his wife !"

That stab cut the deepest. In her strange double nature there was a strain of Puritanism, and although no one suspected her union with Torrens, her wan cheeks flushed to know it had never been legal.

She answered him not a word : she had not tried to stop him when he left the flat. She sat there as though the main-spring of her life were broken, a deserted, discredited woman.

Ellen Evans, who had not been able to catch more than the broken fragments of dialogue from her place near the key-hole, made a pretext for entering, and found the strange visitor looking so like death that she was alarmed.

"Bless me, ma'am, you do seem bad ! Can I get you anything ?"

Lady Elizabeth shook her head.

She never touched alcohol, and lived with Spartan simplicity on every occasion except

those occasional suppers at clubs or restaurants she had attended with Torrens.

"I want nothing," she said, "but to be alone. I shall leave in a few minutes. Does your master mean to return here?"

"I don't think so, ma'am. He has paid me handsome, and told me to get the flat clean for the gentleman as comes in to-morrow. Sir Torrens has recommended me to him, and I'm nearly sure of the place. He is a true gentleman is Sir Torrens, and I'm right down sorry not to serve him any more. But he's taken my address, and I'm to go back to him when he returns to London."

A true gentleman!

The hollow-eyed woman who sat there, her life and her soul wrecked by her infatuation for the "true gentleman" in question, could have laughed in bitterness at the words.

He was now, she supposed, on his way to her young rival, whose heart he would break and whom he would desert when he had spent her money, as he had deserted her.

She had warned Reine from the beginning, she had told her everything at their recent interview. Lady Elizabeth did not care for Reine; but although, when the girl trapped her, she had bitten her hand in crazy fear of discovery, she had no vindictive feelings against her.

Would she go with him now, when he had assured her that their marriage was legal?

Reine was in love with him, and Lady Elizabeth had reason to know the fatal power of love. Nine years before she would have thrown in her lot with Torrens in spite of any claims other women made upon him.

What would Reine do?

She tried to rise, but a curious numbness held her to her seat. The thought of revenge came to her for a moment only to be dismissed. Revenge could not give her back the years she had wasted or clear her soul from its burden of falsehood and fraud.

Her brother, Nevil, to whom she had been a good angel, was devoted to her, and at a word would have hurried to give evidence of having seen Torrens leave the flat in Folkestone Street on the night when Barney was supposed to have been there alone. At the inquest the baronet had testified that, having mislaid his latch-key, he had gone from the club where he had been playing cards to a city hotel for the night, and there had been no reason for suspecting his testimony.

That a gentleman in his position should drug and murder a lad in his employ seemed out of the question, and Ellen Evans, who disliked Barney, had spoken of his fondness for drink and his untidy ways when she gave her evidence about finding his body.

Could it be proved that Torrens had been at his rooms that night things would have looked very different; but Elizabeth Hatherleigh put from her mind the idea of revenging herself.

"It is I who ought to suffer!" she muttered, striking herself sharply on the breast. "I who will have to atone, as women always must for their follies and vices. Men usually go free, in this world at least!" She drew her ermine wrap about her shoulders, and rose slowly, shivering, although the gas fire was alight and the day was bright for a London November.

Movement had grown difficult. She paused, holding on to the table as she approached the door. While she was hesitating, she heard the

electric bell at the front entrance ring several times in quick succession.

A woman's voice, loud and uncouth of accent, came to her ears in colloquy with Ellen Evans, followed by the slower speech of a man.

"I tell you he isn't here!" Ellen Evans was exclaiming as the visitors forced their way into the flat. The next moment Lady Elizabeth was confronted by a tall, handsome, black-haired woman, dressed in deep mourning and carrying a baby in her arms, who burst into the dining-room, and eyed her with defiant suspicion.

"You are Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, I suppose?" the woman said. "I thought you had no dealings with that villain Torrens? My poor Barney told me so, anyway, when he described you to me."

"Will you tell me who you are?"

"Oh, I'll tell you fast enough! I am Nancy Gridley, and Barney Lucas was my only child by my first marriage. My husband's brother Timothy is your ladyship's chauffeur. So now we know who we are, and I'd be glad to know why you're visiting at the flat where my poor boy was murdered!"

"Come, Mrs. Gridley, we must be a little careful what we say!"

The man who entered the room after her, and glanced round it, was, as Lady Elizabeth at once divined, a detective.

That conviction lent her sudden strength, and gave back to her figure the erect stateliness which had always characterised it.

"You are speaking very strangely, Mrs. Gridley," she observed with her usual air of gentle authority. "It is true that Timothy is in my service, as Barney was. It is about

Barney that I called this morning. I hardly know Sir Torrens Hatherleigh, and I have never been here before. But he took an interest in the boy, and I came to learn all I could about his sad death."

"Took an interest in the boy!" cried Barney's mother. "I should think he did, as my poor Barney had evidence to hang him! But that's all in the hands of the police now! I warned my poor child against the danger he was running: I dreamed he was going into a tiger's den. But he was so close, he would hardly tell me a thing, and it wasn't until I read this morning of the inquest that I knew he had been done to death."

"Stop, Mrs. Gridley! This is out of order, you know," put in the detective, who had been vainly trying to check her. "Can your ladyship give me any idea of Sir Torrens' whereabouts? There are a few questions which we want to ask him on information received from this good lady here. Very likely the gentleman will be able to explain."

"I believe that he has already left England. I was not able to see him," Lady Elizabeth said, with her gaze fixed on the startled face of Ellen Evans. "His housekeeper was telling me he had gone abroad as you arrived."

This was her revenge!

She was collecting her wits and energy to enable him to escape, tormenting her brains with surmises as to where he was, and how she could warn him of his danger.

"So you're in league to shelter him, I suppose, because you don't want a murderer in the family!" protested Barney's mother, who was by this time sobbing hysterically. "What I shall ask for is equal justice for the ri

and poor! I've given the police letters to prove this Sir Torrens is a thief and a forger and more than half a murderer already. To think my boy, who was as cute as they make 'em, would have turned on all the gas, unlighted, before he had a drop of whiskey! They must have been fools of jurymen to bring it in suicide. How could he have found his way to the drink without a light? Answer me that! It was left to his poor mother, with five other children to mind, to read this news over her breakfast, and recollect that her boy told her what to do if anything happened to him. - He knew that tiger, Sir Torrens, meant to murder him if he could!"

"Indeed, I can tell you nothing, sir," Ellen Evans said to the detective, who had been questioning her during Mrs Gridley's harangue. "Sir Torrens packed his things early, and left for America, as far as I could make out. I am putting together some ornaments, as the flat is let furnished from to-morrow."

Mindful of Lady Elizabeth's glance and zealous in the interests of Torrens, Mrs. Evans had invented the touch about America, as she had no idea of Torrens' destination.

"Don't you believe her!" cried Barney's mother. "You follow me, and I'll put you on the villain's track! First, though, I must see the room where my poor boy was murdered."

"I shall be glad if you can show me the kitchen," the man said to Ellen. "I shouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't look over all the flat."

"How do you know Sir Torrens isn't escaping while we are all talking here?" Nan Gridley suddenly cried.

"There's a mate of mine outside, so you

needn't be afraid about that," the detective returned.

"I suppose there is no need for me to remain?" Lady Elizabeth suggested as the others moved towards the door. "Sir Torrens was a cousin of my late husband, but I know nothing about him, and have no idea where he has gone."

Her manner was the perfection of well-bred calm, and her name was a synonym for charity. The man bowed and opened the door of the flat for her, in spite of Newmarket Nan's noisy protests.

"Don't you believe her high and mighty airs! I'll lay ten to one she's gone to warn the brute! Let her tell him if the law fails to hang him, I will hunt him down and strangle him with my own hands for killing my boy!"

The furious voice echoed down the staircase after Lady Elizabeth. Outside the house a taxi-cab was waiting. She had come up in it, as she had not wished to employ her brother or Timothy Lucas.

Back to Clayton Street she directed the driver, and was taken up in the lift to the first floor.

It was nearly one o'clock; but Lady Newtown was still in her blue satin dressing-gown and her "pig tail" coiffure, when she burst into the drawing-room to which Lady Elizabeth had been conducted.

"Het" was too angry and too inquisitive to retain the elegant languor of manner which she considered it necessary to assume as a Countess.

"I hear you want to know what's become of my niece!" she began. "That just what I'd like you to tell me! A nice upset there is in

the household about her! First, she's up and out, got up in a white frock, at eight o'clock in the morning, and don't come back until near ten, when you came and said you must see her. Then after you'd gone, she locks herself in her bedroom and has first a letter and then a telegram, and at last a letter by hand, which the impudent messenger boy won't give to me, as he says the gentleman told him to put it in the hands of Miss Reine Hatherleigh herself and no one else. Then she takes the letter, and when I insisted upon seeing her, and asked her natural enough for an explanation, she turned on me as impudent as may be, and says there are things she must keep to herself and I have no right to ask! 'Right!' I says: 'A fine thing to be talked to in that style by a chit of a girl in my own house.' 'Do you wish me to leave it?' she asks cold-like. 'I do,' I says, not half meaning it. With that, would you believe me, but she snatches up her hat and coat before me, seizes her bag, and is up and off and out of the flat before a soul could stop her? And that after all our kindness to her! The Earl's in a fine state, as we haven't a notion where she's gone. But I'm convinced she's bolted with that fellow Torrens Hatherleigh."

This was the end then!

He had married Reine. Either he would escape with her, or he would be arrested for Barney's murder, tried, and perhaps executed.

Lady Elizabeth could do no more. Suddenly, as she regained her seat in the taxi and gave the direction of St. Ursula's, Chiswick, the life and spirit left her and she sank in a huddled heap in a corner of the car.

Her worries and anxieties, her deep remorse

and passionate love: her striving, struggling, scheming, her plans and plots for doing alternate good and evil, all these things faded and seemed to retreat a long way off.

Even the dominant figure of her evil genius grew dim, and as an extraordinary bodily weakness crept over her, her mind wandered feebly back into the days of childhood.

She was conscious of nothing real, and no longer unhappy, a little troubled only by her helplessness. The set calm of her face relaxed. Her lips were murmuring feebly, and she was crying when the car stopped before the lodge gates of her home, and her brother Nevil, known there as Harry Hunt, came to help her descend.

He had been exceedingly anxious about her, and he saw in a moment what had happened. All the softer side of him was touched: gathering the wreck of what had been his masterful sister in his arms, he carried her reverently into the house.

"My poor Betty!" he whispered. "I might have known she would break down under it all! My poor Betty!"

CHAPTER XXIV

TOO LATE

At a quarter to nine on the evening of the day of Reine's secret marriage a taxi-cab drew up before a family hotel not far from Sloane Square, and Dr. Robert Osborne jumped out of it, having come up from Merehampton by the three forty train.

In his pocket was a telegram, which he had studied constantly during the journey.

It had been despatched from the City at half past one o'clock, and read thus :

"Please come up at once. You will find me at the Hans Square Hotel. Am sending this from office of Mr. Wilbrahams, who is taking me there. Urgent. Reine Hatherleigh."

She needed not to have put "urgent."

Robert Osborne was delighted to come, and would have put aside any work which was not a matter of life and death to obey Reine's commands. On this occasion he had been on the point of making the expedition without being summoned, as he had something of great importance to communicate to her.

He had gone to the expense of new clothes for the occasion. Dr. Osborne was always well-dressed, in the sporting English country gentleman style ; but to-day there was an extra freshness and smartness in his garb, just as there was an extra light in his clear grey eyes, and a half-smile of happiness lurking about the corners of his kindly mouth.

She had sent for him, she wanted him; and just at the right time. He knew by her brief but expressive letters that she was not happy with the Newtowns, and that homesickness was growing upon her. He knew also every detail of the sale of the Chase. Torrens had not been able to prevent the transaction from becoming public. It had been carried through in a room of the chief hotel in Merehampton, the walls of which "had ears."

Robert Osborne wondered whether Reine had heard of it, as he gave his name and asked for her at the desk in the hall. It was a smart hotel and the hall led into an elegant "lounge," in which about a dozen of both sexes in dinner dress were assembled. They all belonged to the solid, well-to-do, well-looking, and uninteresting English "upper middle class," and they stared at illustrated papers, and glanced frigidly at each other, after the manner of their order.

Reine was not among them. Presently a page-boy advanced to Dr. Osborne, with the request that he would accompany him to Miss Hatherleigh's private sitting-room.

Here Robert found her, unusually pale and not dressed for dinner, to which she had not descended. A waiter was clearing away a meal as the doctor entered, and as soon as the man had gone, Robert took both the girl's hands and looked hard into her face under the electric light.

"What has happened, Reine?" he asked.
"Something important, I can see."

She drew a long breath.

"Yes, Bob. Very important things have happened. I can't tell you all at once. Sit

down. It's so good to look at a real friend again."

She had altered. He could scarcely define how, but the child had grown into a woman. She was not less but more attractive for that reason; her bright eyes were softer, her mutinous, red-lipped mouth looked more appealing, and the boyish slangy defiance had departed, for the time, at least.

All this was clearly evident to the man who loved her, and, oddly enough, it hurt him. Everything about her had been so dear to him that he could not readily welcome any change.

"I have got to consult you, as my trustee," Reine began suddenly, growing restive under his prolonged scrutiny. "I can't make any headway with that fossil, Mr. Wilbrahams. You must find me somewhere to live."

"That is just what I was coming up to talk to you about, even if you hadn't sent for me. Do you remember our last talk at my house about ten days ago?"

"Yes, well."

"And that I begged you to do nothing for a little while, as I might be able to get some plan?"

"Yes. I wish I had listened to you. But in any case you wouldn't have been able to get what I longed for. To-day I had a letter from Esther Yeo telling me the Chase is sold."

"Yes; it is sold."

"We won't talk about it! It hurts too much, for more than one reason."

"Still, I must say one thing, Reine. If you did not care enough about Torrens Hatherleigh to marry him, you were right a thousand times not to do it for the sake of securing your home."

She gazed at him without speaking. Her eyes were filled with tears and her lips quivered. Never had he seen her look so sad.

"Do you feel very unhappy about the loss of the place?" he asked gently.

"I feel unhappy about that—and other things," she replied. "It isn't only my home that has gone, Bob, but my hopes and belief. I wasn't fit to go into the world. I have muddled everything horribly. Now, I don't seem to know where to turn, and I want to hide myself somewhere on the moors, where I can try to forget. Life used to be so easy. I want, oh, how I want to go back to it!"

"Ah, Reine, my child, there's nothing so difficult in life as going back! I see that someone has hurt you, made you suffer?"

"Yes. But it is chiefly my own fault. My obstinacy and ignorance. As to suffering, Bob, it seems that some women are born to it. One woman, whom I have disliked and judged harshly, must have had a dreadful time. I've been a little burnt myself. Now I want to forget. To-morrow you must take me back to Devonshire."

"Where do you wish to stay?"

"Oh, a hotel, I suppose, until I find somewhere to live in and have the horses with me. They are put up now at a stable near the Park. What a relief it will be to canter over the moors again, after that stupid jogging up and down the muddy Row! And to get away from these ghastly grey streets! You know what's going on at Merehampton and must find me somewhere to live."

Robert Osborne's face beamed.

"I have already found the very thing!" he exclaimed.

"Tell me about it!"

"It's an old estate, placed high, with a splendid view of Dartmoor close at hand, and Exmoor some miles off."

"Like the Chase!" she murmured.

"The lodge is comparatively modern and opens on to a road which dips down later and becomes a narrow Devonshire lane, with black-berry bushes and bracken and fern and holly; you know them, don't you? An avenue of elms leads to the house, which forms three sides of a square, granite, with a slate-roof, and great iron gates to a stone-paved quadrangle. In the middle of the quadrangle is a very old sun-dial in a round plot of grass—"

"Why, that's like the Chase!"

"The history of the house goes back more than four hundred years. People who live in it—and it belonged to the same old Devon family nearly all that time—can explain the coats-of-arms over the windows, and the carved animals in moss-grown stone above the gate leading into the stables. They are in another building, to the left of the house."

"But, Bob, where is this place? It's impossible that I shouldn't know it, as I ride everywhere."

"The building is one-storied," he continued, "with a cloak of small creeper and ivy trained over it. Inside are long passages, lined with old oak, and lighted by little narrow windows, set deep in the walls—"

"There is no place like that near Merehampton but ours!"

"A strange little chapel exists, where service can be held, although it hasn't been used for years, and upstairs there is an ancient armoury, partitioned off by oak, and containing

the upper portion of the huge chimney of the billiard-room below—"

"It's the Chase you are describing! Do you think I want to be reminded of it now? You are unkind, Bob!"

"A sunk flower-garden lies outside, and a plantation of oak and ash trees, and a vegetable garden beyond a red-brick wall on which peaches grow—"

"Please stop! I can't bear it!"

"Still, you have got to live there. To save you all trouble, I have brought you the papers about it."

Robert Osborne's hand was noted for its steadiness; but it shook a little as he rose and placed on the table before Reine a packet of freshly inscribed legal papers.

"Read this!" he said, and spread out before her wondering eyes a parchment roll.

She stared at the words; "deed of gift," and at the names: "Reine Hatherleigh," and "Robert Osborne," and "the Chase," without understanding them.

"Tell me what it all means!" she cried.

"It means, my dearest girl, that I have been able to do just what you wanted most, and have bought back for you, and place in your possession now your old home."

"Robert! You! It can't be true! It was sold by Torrens for twenty thousand pounds to an American—"

"That is Devonshire for an Australian. Ephraim Buckworth bought it, the father of the young man whose life I was able to save after that motor accident. He was splendidly grateful and could not do enough for me. When he knew this was what I wanted, he bought the Chase for me."

"Bought it for you!"

"For me to give you, of course! I don't want the place!"

She understood at length, and putting her head down on the parchment roll, she sobbed.

"You generous, absurd old friend!" she exclaimed presently, looking up through her tears. "I can't tell you how I love you for it! Of course I can't take it: but I will buy it of you."

"No, you won't! It is your own."

"What made you do such a thing?"

"Love, Reine," he replied simply. "Ever since I first met you, you have been dearer to me than anything alive."

She looked at his kind eyes, shining with tenderness for her, very sadly.

"Why couldn't you have told me this before?" she asked. "I was always fond of you."

"Not fond as I wanted, dear. And I had nothing to offer you."

"You could have offered me kindness and truth and loyalty. We are always happy together. You ought to have asked me to marry you when Dad died. I believe I would have taken you. And it would have prevented such a lot of misery!"

He knelt by her chair and took her two hands, which were clasped on the table, in one of his.

"Can't you take me now?" he asked.

"No, Bob. You're too late! I can't take you now or ever. I have made an awful hash of things, and—this morning I got married!"

Robert Osborne rose to his feet. The glow of hope faded from his face to give place presently to a deep pity. Reine had lowered her face upon her hands again and was weeping.

He had never seen her cry before. She had been always more a big, boyish child with him than a suffering woman, and it cut him to the heart to witness her distress.

He brought a chair near to her's and seating himself, laid his hand gently on her arm.

"Tell your old friend all about it," he said. "Why should you be miserable? Where is he—your husband?"

He got the words out bravely, though he hated to say them.

"Don't call him that!" burst passionately from Reine. "I don't want ever to see the man again! I suppose you guess who it is?"

"Sir Torrens Hatherleigh?"

"Yes. We were to have left for Egypt to-night, and to come back and live at the Chase."

"Is it because he sold the place without letting you know that you have broken from him?"

"No! I had hardly got back to the flat after the ceremony when I learned a great deal about him. I can't tell you or anybody. But I have made a terrible mistake. My father was right. Torrens is bad right through!"

She sprang from her seat and began to walk up and down the room in a state of feverish excitement. Dr. Osborne's heart ached as he watched her; but he steeled himself to speak in quiet, professional tones.

"I am not only your father confessor, but your medical man, Reine," he said. "And my prescription is that you go to bed as soon as possible. I shall put up at the Park Hotel quite close, and come round and see you to-morrow."

"Come early," she said, "and take me away home! I can't thank you enough; it is beyond thanks. If you won't let me buy the place

I must be your tenant. Getting back to the Chase will just save me. If I lived through many days like to-day I am sure I should go mad."

He held one of her hands in a strong, friendly grasp, and was wishing her good-night when, through the London Street outside, the raucous voice of a newsvendor struck upon their ears.

By some strange instinct, in that moment of highly-wrought feeling, each paused to listen to the words which were being shouted, as though they divined that the announcement in some way concerned themselves.

What they heard was this :

"Arrest of a baronet on a charge of the murder of his servant !"

CHAPTER XXV

THE MEETING ON THE MOORS

Two weeks of December had passed. Reine Hatherleigh was ruling again at the Chase, not as she used to do, with a lax hand, but after a more strenuous fashion.

Fortunately for her, the old servants were dispersed, having grown rich on the former system. Mrs. Welfare, who would have tormented Reine by her incessant references to that faultless hero of her imagination, Torrens Hatherleigh, had gone home to her relations at Barnstaple, and the fair Esther Yeó had at length tracked down her quarry, and married an elderly butcher from Tavistock, a widower, over whose family of six young children she would in future preside.

Horrocks, the butler, had wedded the widowed hostess of the Hatherleigh Arms, amid much local rejoicing. Only the family coachman was glad to come back, as he had been moping in the village since Sir John's death. At fifty he felt too old to "learn motoring," and such a situation as his was difficult to find. His son, fresh from "soldiering," entered Reine's service as groom. Stable-boy there was none at present, for Thelma, Bessie, and a couple of cobs were the only occupants of the vast stables.

Four women servants took the places of seven women and a butler. Dr. Osborne, in

his character of landlord, had insisted upon substantial repairs to the Chase, and on the cutting down of needless expenses. In spite of her handsome income, Reine was startled by the outlay she would have to make to put the place in order. Broken walls, defective chimneys, rotten boarding, worn-out pipes: all these things, with a hundred other details, she was forced to look into by her new "landlord."

"You are not a child any longer. All this is part of your duty in life," Bob Osborne said with decision.

The next moment, seeing her rueful look, he added:

"Never mind, my child! I will help you through with it all I can."

Occupation was what she needed to prevent her from brooding or moping, and he so arranged things that she hardly had a moment to herself. The girl was in an unusually docile mood, and took advice as she never would have done in the old days.

Only on one point she rebelled.

Chaperon she would have none.

"You and I know I am married, if no one else does," she said. "And married women can't want chaperons. I can't bear to think of that man being my husband; but still, as he is, I needn't be bothered with any woman to look after me. They are only necessary to keep girls out of mischief and prevent them from marrying the wrong man. Well, I have married the wrong man, so there's an end to it, and I can be left alone!"

It was useless for Dr. Osborne to argue about what the world would say. "The world," in that corner of Dartmoor, had, as Reine put it, known about her all her life; and if it

couldn't trust her or didn't approve of her, it was welcome to "do the other thing." A middle-aged housekeeper to direct the other women servants was the only concession Bob Osborne could extract from his nineteen-year old tenant.

"I believe it is your mother, and not you, who has started all this conventional business about my wanting some old lady to play propriety for me," Reine declared. "As I am always on horseback when I am not driving, where would she be all the time? Playing propriety with the chairs and tables at home?"

Mrs. Osborne's indignation was too deep for words when she learned that her younger son had "flung away the providential chance" in life offered him by Mr. Buckworth's magnificent generosity in order to buy Reine Hatherleigh's old home and let her live in it.

"Even if Robert had so little ambition that he did not care to buy himself a fashionable practice," she complained, "he might at least have given some thought to his family. Another hundred a year would be a great help to Anthony, with the pressing needs of his parish, and, possibly if my dear girls had a more ample dress allowance, their natural good looks might be enhanced and they would marry. Not but what they are perfectly happy at home! It is all very well to write and tell me he has let the Chase indefinitely to Miss Hatherleigh for six hundred a year, and means to set aside a portion for me! What is six hundred as interest on twenty thousand? That terrible slangy young person, who dresses like a man and smokes cigarettes, meant to have Robert from the beginning, and I cannot blame Kathleen Pringle if she has given up all idea

of him and taken to encouraging the Reverend Samuel Wilson. My friends tell me I have the most extraordinary foresight: certainly, from the moment I saw that pert tomboy stride into the drawing-room, something told me my poor son would have no chance against her!"

No one but Mrs. Osborne put in any protest. People in the neighbourhood were glad to have a Hatherleigh back at the Chase, and saw no reason why Dr. Osborne should not invest his money in a landed estate. Everyone naturally knew all about it, as they come to do in small provincial towns and scattered neighbourhoods, wherein food for conversation is scarce, and where residents every now and then break out into singular escapades for the sake of doing something.

Nor did anyone try to interfere with Reine. Lord and Lady Newtown gave up their guardianship of their niece as easily as they had undertaken it, and accepted in a friendly spirit her invitation to spend a few days at the Chase at Christmas. Mr. Sidney Wilbrahams, having been informed that the young lady was secretly married, suggested no other guardians for her, and Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh, was past consulting.

Reine went to see her at the Canterbury house to which she had been removed under her brother's care. She found her feeble and helpless as a child, and was not even sure that she had been recognised. A company of energetic and benevolent ladies had been got together with a view to continuing the work of the Retreats and Homes; but an examination of the "Lady Mother's" accounts proved that she must have had "other charities" on her hands, no details of which were ever entered,

and also that her personal work in "beating up" subscriptions had been tireless and unending.

Debts, too, hung about the institution, and so far things were in so confused a condition that the closing of most of these centres of benevolence seemed probable, there being no money in hand or invested.

The name of Hatherleigh did not at the moment smell sweet in the nostrils of the general public.

"Newmarket Nan's" sensational statements, which had led to the arrest of Sir Torrens Hatherleigh as he was entering his club, had filled columns in Sunday and sporting papers. Mrs. Gridley was only too glad to be interviewed, and dilated eloquently upon her premonitions of evil about her beloved son.

Torrens had been led away, protesting his innocence and astonishment. An order had been issued for exhuming Barney's newly-interred body, and bail had been refused to the baronet on the strength of Barney's packet of papers and written records, which proved the hold he had upon his master.

Devonshire papers copied the London accounts. Reine's cheeks flamed when she read them; but she had said, so far, not a word of her feelings on the subject to Dr. Osborne. He knew well that the more she felt the less she said, and mistrusted her silence.

The girl had grown much quieter. Those few weeks in London had tamed her, and almost it seemed, taken the colour out of her. Her picturesque freedom of speech had been toned down by the companionship of Lady Newtown, and the same lady had inspired in her a distaste against cigarette-smoking in public.

Reine smiled less, the dimples about her soft red lips showed themselves more rarely, and most of her time she spent in riding alone over the moors.

Robert Osborne had told her that in life it was difficult to "go back" to any former phase of existence. She was beginning to find the truth of it. It was an intense relief to be at home again; but now and then, for no reason that she could fathom, her heart ached and tears clouded her eyes.

She had learned to love and to suffer, to feel, to pity, and to regret; big, serious lessons which stamped their impress on her character.

Life was not all cub-hunting and billiard-playing, sunshine, snowballing and sleep. It began to appear to her as a business which was beyond her comprehension.

Nevertheless, as she rode for hours through the sunshine which touched the tors and dispelled the thick grey mists of winter, something like an understanding of life's mysteries was revealed to her, as it is to sincere souls in key with nature.

Snow was beginning to fall as she rode home in the late afternoon of a chilly mid-December day from the village of Torford, where she had been calling at a farmhouse to see some horses for the plough.

Attached to the Chase was a home farm, in the direction of which Reine took a lively interest. She had remained to tea with the farmer and his wife, and returned now by a short cut over a wild portion of the moors.

Riding was not the safest means of progression on Dartmoor in a wintry mist, with the many bogs and rivulets beginning to take on a hard and slippery surface. But Bessie knew

every inch of the way and was as careful as her rider.

Not the cold but a stab of memory made Reine shiver as her eyes fell on a slow-moving cloud of white vapour far below her, beneath which lay the Barrow Pool.

It was to her adventure there that Torrens owed his hold upon her. To save a man's life evokes a protective tenderness, not in the rescued but in the rescuer. The girl recalled vividly her agony of anxiety as she beheld the pale, strained face of her father's cousin above the treacherous bog, his pluck and coolness, and the outburst of affection he had shown when he thanked her.

"I would have done it for any man," she told herself.

Yet what possible good had she achieved by saving him?

The man was a cruel, cowardly murderer, in the hands of the law, and soon to be tried for his life.

More than that, he was her husband.

She had given him a girl's first love, passionate and unquestioning, had thrilled at his touch, and trembled with delight at his kiss.

She rode now on the lonely moors with bent head and cheeks which burned painfully as she thought of it all.

"It would have been far better for both of us if I had let him die!" she murmured. "Yet how could I? If it were to do again, I could not act differently."

A few yards to the left of the rough track she followed, there rose a little hillock, crowned by a tor of scattered granite boulders. Two shaggy-haired ponies which had been sheltering beneath it darted out at Bessie's approach.

Reine called to them encouragingly, as she knew by name many of the Dartmoor wanderers. From the top a human voice returned her greeting, and the figure of a man crept out and barred her path.

It was nearly six o'clock, and by the feeble light it was difficult to distinguish details. The man was tall and broad-shouldered, and seemed to be walking lame. He was dressed after the fashion of a superior mechanic, in a rough tweed suit and pilot coat, the collar of which was turned up to his ears. His hair was hidden under his peaked cap, and his shaven face was dirty; but Reine knew the blue eyes and the perfect features in an instant.

The man's good looks were against successful disguise; to her at least Torrens Hatherleigh remained Torrens Hatherleigh.

He seemed to have no doubt of his welcome. Laying his hand on her bridle, he addressed her in hoarse, tired tones of relief and affection.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "Reine, my girl, what a bit of luck! I'm half-frozen, been on the moors two hours. Gave them the slip driving in a cab through London, and caught the eleven train. Some infernal fellow was dodging me in Merehampton, so I got on the moors. Knew you were at the Chase, so came to you, of course."

He came to her "of course!"

Even while he spoke he staggered, and his intended fell forward against Bessie's neck. "Are you ill?" she asked, and to herself short cut sounded thin and hard.

Riding wry! Breakfasted at six thirty. sion on Dartmoor—of a time since! Had to run many bogs and the moor. Slipped and hurt a hard and slippery crawled here, and the ponies

kept the entrance warm. You know I could always do what I liked with ponies."

He could always "do what he liked" with women, too, she reflected. But she could not let him stand there, weak, tired, and in pain, in actual danger of his life and liberty.

She slipped off Bessie.

"Get up in my saddle," she said. "Where do you want to go?"

He turned to her in surprise.

"Why, home, of course," he answered. "It's the only safe place for you to hide me in."

CHAPTER XXVI

GOING HOME

"KICKING a man when he was down," that was what Reine could not do.

She kept silence as she walked by Bessie's side in the gathering darkness. She attempted no words of welcome, nor did she congratulate Torrens on his escape. Only when he leaned forward in the saddle and flung his arm round her neck did she draw back sharply and exclaim :

"Not that, please !"

"Odd if I can't kiss my own wife !" he demurred. "But indeed, darling, I'm not fit to kiss anyone until I have had a wash : I smeared some earth over my face and hands to look more workman like. Where do you propose to hide me ?"

"There is a deep hole in the floor of the armoury under the boards by the side of the wall where the billiard-room chimney projects. My cousins and I found it as children. There's room for a man to stand and move about, and through a hole in the wall of the hearth of the billiard-room food can be passed."

"Jolly uncomfortable ! Might make use of it as a last resource. Can't old Welfare put me up somewhere ? Pretend I'm a relation of hers ?"

"Mrs. Welfare has left. The servants are all new."

"Then they won't know my face, which is a

good thing! If I lie low here a day or two, we can try to get to Plymouth and on by boat to Brittany."

"We!"

She shivered as she listened, but said not a word. This was not the moment for reproaches.

The snow fell faster, in flakes which fluttered on the edge of the broken ground and withered heather, but did not melt. The mists grew thicker, and progress was difficult and slow.

Into Reine's mind there flashed the thought that this was the home-coming of the bridegroom with his bride, the return of the last of the Hatherleighs of Dartmoor to the home of his ancestors!

By night, in cold and stealth, an escaped criminal, hunted by the police, was creeping to cover, in dread of arrest, perhaps even of the gallows.

He had vowed to her on more than one occasion that if she would marry him they would live together at "the dear old Chase."

Now, against his will, he was keeping his word, and husband and wife together were going home.

It was needful to avoid the chief entrance to the house. Reine led Torrens to a point not far from the lane which went down to the stables. Here he dismounted and she gave him directions.

He was to break into the grounds through a weak point in the hedge which bordered the plantation, and make his way up to the back of the house. Reine herself would let him in by the chapel door, and from the chapel gallery there was access to Reine's rooms and the armoury.

"That's capital, my pet!" Torrens exclaimed.

"If the armoury and my hiding-place are close to you, that is all I ask!"

Again Reine shivered, but she made no comment.

"And please remember I am fiercely hungry!" he added. "And thirsty, too."

His composure astounded her. As to remorse or regret, he appeared incapable of either. Staring at him in wonder in the darkness, Reine realized that Lady Elizabeth's words were true: the man had no moral sense, no proper consciousness of right and wrong. As un-moral as a young animal, Lady Elizabeth had said. And she was right. All that Torrens had wanted through life he had tried to obtain by any means which came to his hand. If he missed it, he was sorry; but if he injured other people in the process of seeking it, that fact troubled him not at all.

A weight, invisible but overpowering, seemed to creep over Reine's shoulders as she went down to open the chapel door, after she had hastily changed her clothes and dismissed her maid.

A tall, halting figure crept across the space between the house and a grove of oak and ash trees near which he had been hiding. For greater security Reine had brought no light, and as he found himself safely inside the locked door, Torrens caught her in his arms and tried to kiss her.

"This is the second time you have saved me!" he whispered. "My darling, my wife!"

She tore herself from his clasp.

"Please remember you are in danger," she said, "and follow me without speaking!"

Up the creaking and worm-eaten staircase of the chapel a gallery led through a low, oak door

into a passage which ran alongside of Reine's private apartments, and ended in the armoury.

This was oak-panelled throughout, and hung with various old weapons collected by the late Squire, together with more modern guns, fishing-rods, whips, and implements for golf and tennis. On one side the great chimney of the billiard-room below projected, running up into the roof, and to the right of this projection stood a table covered with the litter which accumulates in old houses, such as dusty fragments of wood carving, ancient nails and locks, torn pieces of moth-eaten tapestry, and tattered books and papers.

The oil lamp in the passage outside gave enough light through the open door to distinguish these things.

"We must move the table," Reine whispered, "and very quietly, because they are laying a little table for my dinner in the billiard-room below by the fire. I gave orders to have it served me there."

"Shan't I be scorched, so near the chimney?"

"You will be very warm, of course. But I've been there myself, playing hide and seek, while a fire has been lit. Like that, I can pass you food easily, and in the night you can get away."

Long before the days when "priest's holes" became necessary on account of religious persecution, this hiding-place had been made by the first designers of the Chase. Whether it had been intended to conceal a friend or incarcerate a prisoner, no one knew. After the table had been removed, and the square of flooring lifted, Torrens stared down the dark hole with some distaste.

"It's a bit of a drop!" he demurred. "What do I fall upon?"

Reine took from a shelf a rope ladder, and

kneeling down, slung it round a projecting beam above the cavity.

"That's what we did as children," she explained. "There's nothing down there but dust and dirty boards. Quick! They are sounding the gong for my dinner and will be coming up to see if I have heard it! I must put back the table before I go down."

She held back the boards still kneeling. Dressed in a black crepe dinner gown, her face flushed and her eyes alight with nervous excitement, she looked beautiful and fresh enough to stir any man's heart. And Torrens' heart was easily stirred.

Before venturing on the rope ladder descent, he slipped on his knees by her side and caught her to him.

"You clever darling! I knew you would pull me through!" he murmured as he pressed his lips to hers.

She thrust him sharply on one side and sprang up, letting the boards fall backwards with a crash.

"I will save you if I can! But I will not be touched by you!" she panted out, with eyes ablaze.

The man laughed as he lowered himself by the ladder.

It was impossible for him to believe that any woman whom he honoured with his attentions could do otherwise than love him. Besides, was not Reine his wife and actually his property?

Later on he was resolved to remind her of the fact. Meantime his hunger and thirst had to be appeased.

His hiding-place formed an actual portion of the open fire-place in the billiard-room, which in feudal days had been the great hall of

the manor-house. A partition of stonework separated him from the hearth, and at about five feet from the ground there was a cavity sufficiently large for the passage of a man's hand. Peering through it, Torrens could see nothing but the fire on the hearth below; but he could hear Reine's voice speaking to the servant.

"You needn't wait, Somers. I shall want to look at the papers over dinner, and shall be a long time. Send in the dogs, Jan and Sport! I haven't seen them to-day."

"Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Greenways had put away the papers, ma'am. She seemed to think there was something in the *Merehampton Express* which might upset you—"

"Bring them to me at once, please! And the dogs."

He could not see her, but he divined that she was reading in the local paper about his escape in the morning. Presently he heard her voice immediately outside his retreat. She was bringing him food and wine, and urging him to take them quickly.

"When you have drunk, give me back the glass, or Somers will miss it," she murmured.

He thrust out that beautiful white hand of his which she had so often admired, and took the glass from her.

"I shall drink in your glass and know your thoughts, dear!" he whispered gaily.

It seemed to her equally repulsive and astonishing that Torrens should waste time in flirting when his life and liberty were at stake. A sick anxiety oppressed her, together with a horror of the man and the crimes with which he was charged.

In the London paper of that day, and in the

local paper which chronicled his escape, she read of them again in full. He effected his escape after the adjourned inquest, at which the evidence against him had been damning, and the verdict one of "wilful murder against Torrens Hatherleigh."

All that Barney Lucas had overheard at the interview between Sir John and his cousin had been carefully written down by the lad, and preserved, together with the packet of papers he had stolen from his master's desk. The world now knew Torrens Hatherleigh for what he was—forger, thief, and murderer.

Reine read the whole thing through, sitting there with white face and dry lips, while the man she was hiding hungrily devoured the meal with which she had provided him, out of her sight, but within her power.

She herself could not eat, and to touch with her lips a glass which had been in contact with his was impossible. Even before she descended to the billiard-room she had vigorously washed her face to remove the taint of his kiss. The mere sound of his voice as he whispered affectionate thanks for her attentions made her shudder, and she felt it to be a desecration that he should dare to call her "wife."

Yet, as she sat before the little table near the fire, and heard the wind outside rise to a gale, and the sleet and snow blown against the window-panes, she had no doubt of what she meant to do. She would shelter this last degenerate scion of her father's house as far as it lay in her power; she would do her utmost to help him to get clear away. No other course was possible.

She felt no surprise when Somers entered

the billiard-room before she removed the dinner things to announce the arrival of Dr. Osborne.

It seemed to Reine natural that her old friend should come to her unsummoned at this crisis in her life.

He found her in the act of feeding the dogs, for which she had sent in order to account for the disappearance of so much food. The precaution had been unwise. Jan and Sport, a rough-haired terrier and brown retriever, had speedily discovered and strongly resented the presence of a guest in the chimney-hole. Reine had had the greatest difficulty in reducing them to order, and in preventing them from betraying Torrens' hiding-place.

She looked up over their heads at Robert Osborne. She was exerting her utmost powers of self-control; but he knew in an instant that something serious had happened.

In the presence of the servant he was cautious.

"Please forgive the lateness of this call, Reine," he said as he shook hands with her. "I wanted a business chat with you. How wise of you to use this homely, comfortable chimney corner instead of having your meals in that vast table in the dining-room!"

"I went for a long ride, and was so cold when I came in that I wanted to sit nearly in the fire," she returned.

"Not much of a blaze, though! Shall I put some more logs on?"

"No!"

She spoke quickly to arrest him as he moved towards the wood cupboard, and Jan the terrier, sniffing about the hearth, growled.

"Take the dogs out with you, Somers!"

Reine called to the maid who was leaving the room with the tray.

As the door closed on the woman she turned to Robert Osborne.

"Sit down, Bob," she said. "I can guess what you have come for. It's about Torrens Hatherleigh."

"Yes. You have read of his escape?"

"Yes?"

"And—and the whole thing?"

"Yes," she answered, with a sort of quick defiance. "I know it all! I know he robbed my grandmother and forged her name, and brought about my father's death if he did not actually kill him, and tricked Lady Elizabeth Hatherleigh into a false marriage, and lived by stealing the money she earned for charity—"

"What do you mean?"

"All that is not in the papers, but I know it. Some of it from her before her illness, and the rest from her brother, when I went to see her at Canterbury, and found her a broken, half-imbecile old woman."

"Reine! You have told me nothing of this before!"

"I have told no one; why should I? Is it a thing to be proud of that such a man deceived me, too? I know all the rest. How that boy thought he would spy upon him and blackmail him, and how Torrens lured him into his service and drugged and murdered him. I have read every word; how they found traces of the drug, and how Torrens had lied about his visit to the flat and his arrival at the hotel. I know it all, Bob. There is nothing you can tell me."

"My poor girl. But you don't know that he was seen to enter a train for Merehampton

after a woman in a hairdresser's shop near Waterloo had lent him money and clothing—"

Reine laughed in a way unlike her, harsh and painful to hear.

"A woman again!" she exclaimed. "That is where he has always been so clever. Women help him, women keep him, women break their hearts over him. When he kills, it is not in open fight; his victims are an elderly man with heart disease, and a helpless lad. Torrens is clever, you see, clever in cunning and cowardice."

"Yet you love him, Reine!"

"I did love him. Or rather, I loved what I thought he was because I was an ignorant girl, and did not understand him. I know him now as a pitiful coward or madman. One does not love lunatics or cowards."

"If he came to you, chased by the police, what would you do?"

"What could I do but try to save him?"

She had risen, and the two stood near together, facing each other, both intensely excited, worked up to fever-heat by the situation.

"My dear," he said, "I heard a rumour that Sir Torrens had been tracked here, and I rode over to warn you. I see that he is here."

"Yes," she said in a low voice, her brilliant eyes fixed full upon him, "he is here. And you must help me to save him."

"You know I will."

He gripped her hand for a moment. Even before his clasp was loosened, sounds of a commotion immediately outside the door reached their ears.

A moment later two men entered the room, one of whom Dr. Osborne recognised as the Police Inspector of Merehampton.

It seemed like part of an ugly dream to Reine as Dr. Osborne spoke with them. She heard him assure them that he had called to inform Miss Hatherleigh of the rumours in the town, and to reassure her. The Inspector knew her by sight, and had a great respect for the Hatherleighs. But a sense of his own importance sustained him, particularly in the companionship of a London police agent.

Miss Hatherleigh utterly ignored the whereabouts of the missing Torrens. So Dr. Osborne declared, and she bent her head in confirmation of the statement. The Inspector had a duty to do. The escaped prisoner had been tracked to the moors close by and would probably seek shelter in his family home.

The place must be searched, with Miss Hatherleigh's permission—or without it.

There were men stationed outside the walls; escape would be out of the question, the Inspector said.

Reine heard him without moving a muscle of her face. As the two men left the room after glancing round it and tapping at the walls, she sank wearily into a chair.

She had done what she could. It was for Fate to decide whether Torrens would escape or would fall into their hands.

Torrens within his shelter must have heard all that passed. It was impossible to leave it by any other means but the one he had used to enter it.

She had not even told Robert Osborne where he was concealed; she ignored whether he knew of the secret hiding-place. He remained there, seated opposite to her, but not looking at her, in perfect silence, listening, and she felt the comfort of his friendly presence.

Presently, sounds of heavy footsteps in the armoury immediately over their heads reached their ears.

They looked at each other and Reine's colour changed.

"I forgot one thing," she whispered. "The floor was covered with dust under the table. I must have disturbed it. The light is so bad that perhaps they will not notice it."

They had noticed it, evidently, for the footsteps halted at one spot, and the sound of heavy furniture being moved reached them, followed by the loud fall of the trap door.

For the first time Reine's composure gave way.

Uttering a low cry, she buried her face in her hands. At the same moment the sound of a pistol-shot rang out sharply.

Dr. Osborne sprang to his feet.

Torrens had shot his would-be captor and escaped, he supposed. He could not leave Reine, who was sobbing convulsively, but she motioned him away as he approached to soothe her.

"Don't mind me, Bob! Go, pray go and see what is happening."

At the door, as he was leaving the room, he met the Inspector, who had come to summon him.

"A case for you, sir," the man said as he led the way to the armoury. "We had got him fast enough, but as soon as we sighted him, he whipped out a revolver and shot himself."

Robert Osborne saw at once, as Torrens was lifted into the light, that he was past human aid.

He had lived meanly enough, but at least, as the men said, he "died game."

Dr. Osborne knelt beside him while one of the men held a lamp over the dying man.

Lifting his eyes for the last time, Torrens beheld the white face of Reine in the doorway, gazing at him with distended eyes, and tried to smile.

"Only thing I could do!" he murmured. "Good-bye, Reine! Forgive—"

It was the one touch of saving grace about him that with his last breath he asked for forgiveness, realising that he needed it.

Reine was woman enough to shed tears over him. Yet she knew that he had said truly it was the one and only course left to put an end to a worthless life.

Her heart would ache over the whole episode for a long time to come.

But she was young, and life was all before her. Very soon the ugly memory would pass like a black cloud from the sky, and the strain she had endured would but render her gentler and more pitiful.

So at least Robert Osborne hoped. And he had never failed to understand Reine Hatherleigh.

THE END

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